



TOWARDS  
THE GULF.



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TOWARDS THE GULF



# TOWARDS THE GULF

A Romance of Louisiana

*"To meet was love—the love that leads to death—  
And yet, God ruling heaven and earth—they met"*

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## CHAPTER I.

THE circumstances which surrounded old Madam Morant were so favorable that the announcement of her intention to build a winter residence in New Orleans was received by her friends with marked satisfaction. Among the delightful things said of her, one might have heard such expressions as have been common to all times in similar cases:

"The most charming woman one could meet."

"Eminently fitted to be a social leader."

"Entitled to one's gratitude, for she will entertain royally."

"What a magnificent place she can make of it!"

And some commented freely upon the probable extent of the income which would enable

her to support almost princely style. There were large plantations and innumerable slaves. They were certainly equal to enormous drafts upon their resources, and it was intimated that there were lucrative investments in France, which added materially to the Madam's wealth. Her discretion in the selection of locality was commended. There was no doubt that real estate was advancing in the chosen section, and for neighbors, all agreed that with one or two exceptions she would have the best the old municipality could boast.

When the house was completed, it was considered the finest in the neighborhood, in fact many considered it the finest in the whole city. Possibly it was. One must concede something to tradition.

The Madam's friends were not disappointed in their expectations of splendid hospitality. So long as she lived she dispensed it. In the enjoyment of her worldly advantages she contributed unselfishly and largely to the pleasure of others, while the harmony and unity of her temper extended her life into beautiful old age and distinguished its close. Few ever spoke of her husband. He made



little impression on his small world, but her name was potential long after she passed away from all her great possessions. Her descendants often boasted of her grandeur, and with a remnant of her wealth supported claims to social distinction which were never disputed by those who came within their exclusive circle.

The house is yet occupied; but one chancing to enter a certain dilapidated old cemetery in the heart of the city may decipher the old Madam's name under the "Ici Repose" which prefaces a long inscription commemorating her talents and virtues.

Time in its progress from good to bad and from bad to worse wrought many changes in the old French district where the house was built. Wealth came and vanished. The drift of improvement, for a long time totally arrested, was afterwards in an entirely different direction. The region reached a period in its decline when stagnation became picturesque and silence eloquent. Strange phantoms flitted with singular pertinacity before the imagination of those who entered this quaint old quarter, clothing themselves in ro-

mantic garb, and conveying to the senses the prevailing pathos of an irrevocable past.

At the date of which we write, one trying to find the Madam's house would have succeeded only after a long stroll through quiet, almost deserted streets. A tall, three-storied building, rising with a prison-like front straight up from the banquet, each story marked by a row of ancient, slatless blinds always closed to the world of sunshine and shadow without, one might well pause before it to consider the merit of tradition. Its attractiveness was certainly apart from its proportions. Possessing no architectural beauty, it appealed to an artistic eye only through its suggestiveness of a romantic past. The front door, battered and weather-stained, with rusty hinges and dull lock, bore witness that hospitable intent no longer dominated the entrance.

To the right, a wall scarcely lower than the first story of the building excluded from view the garden in which the old Madam planted the aged evergreens still surviving neglect and ill-usage.

On long afternoons, while the old house imbrowned itself in the advancing shadows, the

fading sunlight rested upon a small house over the way, whose single window struggled to catch the declining rays in the same hopeless, appealing way that it had done ever since its pretentious neighbor had first frowned upon it. In the Madam's day there used to come every morning to the low front door of this little house a fine-looking woman, noted for the whiteness of the neckerchief which was crossed upon the bosom of her black gown, the creamy pallor of a skin once very beautiful, and the sadness of large dark eyes which were never raised to catch the light except when, taking her seat on the low steps, she threaded the glittering needle which represented bread and life to her and hers. Besides the poor seamstress, there might be seen occasionally passing beyond the open doorway slenderer figures and younger ones, a dark, rich-colored, merry face and another pallid and sad-eyed. Did one comment on their strange dark beauty, there came instantly the chill shadow of reproach, the shadow of race distinction in the frown which silenced discussion of it.

»A certain class of gossips formerly created

a lively interest by stories told of these people. It was said that a Virginia trader brought to a slave-yard in the neighborhood two beautiful quadroon girls. They were sisters, and on account of their extreme gracefulness and beauty they were held at a marvellous price by the dealer in human flesh. One fell into the hands of a wealthy planter, distinguished alike for his intelligence and his conviviality, and was carried off, a panting picture of horror and despair, to a remote plantation. The other was purchased by a famous gambler, who, when tired of his bargain, gave the woman and her children their freedom, and the little house, even then falling into decay, as a home. They had all drifted away in some strange, mysterious manner, and the little house had ever since been closed to human occupancy. Old Pasquale, the wrinkled Dago who kept the corner fruit and oyster shop, with its swarming flies and its fetid smells, could have told one a great deal about them if he had been less dull and superstitious. Perhaps the only other person who distinctly remembered them was Celine, an aged negress, the immemorial property of the Morants.

An object strangely incongruous with its surroundings is no unusual fact in the boundary of one's vision, indicating as it frequently does the beginning of one of Nature's perpetually recurring changes from progress to decay, and from decay to progress again. Thus the single exception to the general antiquity and dilapidation of the neighborhood at the time under our consideration could not fail to strike one. A saucy-looking green-and-white cottage occupied a corner lot which had once formed part of the garden attached to the quadroon's property. It marked the growth of a new influence which had begun to assert itself, and there were neighboring eyes which would not look upon its aggressive assumption of prosperity. Such small things do sometimes add weight to burdens already hard to bear.

A survey of the rigidly closed shutters of the Madam's old house would determine the fact that its occupants followed the precedents of their generation in utterly ignoring and never voluntarily acknowledging by so much as a glance the existence of disagreeable facts.

The occupants were descendants of the old Madam, inheriting her pride, winning temper, and love of social pre-eminence, restricted only in the exercise of these qualities by the poverty which they had neither the training nor mental vigor to overcome.

Reverses of fortune and other calamities had closed the house. For a series of years no Morant occupied it; but a sentiment of pride added to one of judicious economy had induced the last members of this old family to redeem the place by payment of taxes long due upon it, and once more to establish themselves there.

One might have waited for days for any sign of life about the place, unless one chanced to be near by, when very rarely, and only in the early morning hours, old Celine, the one servant of the household, opened a small, rusty gate in the garden wall, and sallied forth to market.

The stately old negress never looked to the right nor to the left as she passed slowly through the deserted streets. Apparently things present possessed no significance for her; but a solemn stare and an occasional



shake of the head seemed to hint, possibly, of unspoken memories of glories passed away forever.

Frugal ways had been learned under pressure of circumstances, and the basket she carried never came back heavily laden.

The prying little woman in the green-and-white cottage, who flattened her nose daily against the front window-pane, knew how little it contained, though she had never exchanged a word with its bearer; but in ignorance of the impertinent curiosity which enjoyed counting the vegetables in the basket, no less than spying out the cobwebs in the neighbors' entry, the old negress went her way silently and peacefully.

The qualifications for gayety were not to be found among the members of the family which secluded itself behind closed shutters, and life inside the house was in accord with the dulness around it.

Its dulness mattered little to good old Major Morant, the head of the household, the only remaining and oldest son of the charming Madam: for all the rest had either died before they had been summoned to defend

the South, or had perished on its battle-fields. He had reached that period when monotony was the essential harmony in a life which had sounded most pleasures. His youth and middle age had been singularly free from care. Wealth and position had come to him by inheritance, and his life had been modelled upon the epicurean philosophy; yet fate had spared him many virtues. When loss of fortune came, mainly by unfortunate speculation, and the world had nothing more to offer, he bore it kindly, and his old age crystallized into simple childlike content.

There was yet left for his enjoyment his cosey arm-chair, his daily cigar, and the small chess-table at which he spent many hours pondering problems that never grew quite clear to his failing faculties.

The major was proud of his descent from the Morants, but prouder still of the Huguenot blood which flowed in his veins. From this latter source came the courtly manners which distinguished the gallant old gentleman, and made him attractive even in his advanced years. His hair was thin and white, and his shoulders bent; but his speech was



never querulous or bitter. Life, though hard now, had been worth a great deal in the days gone by, and with the memory of those days lighting up the shadows of the present he met Time's advances with smiles which ploughed furrows in all the pleasant curves about his kindly mouth and merry blue-gray eyes.

The youth of his only daughter Isabel had surrendered to sadder circumstances. The loss of fortune and necessity for economy had come upon her at that period of her young girlhood when the gay world gleamed upon her exalted fancy like the processional incidents of her childish fairy tales. She had never uttered any protest against her fate, and thanked God daily for the small income which was sufficient for their quiet life; but there were times when the spirit of unrest and discontent made a fair fight for possession of her soul. It was pathetic to see upon her face the traces of beauty dimmed by the struggle. The sorrowful droop of eyes and mouth carved other lines than pleasant ones. When not engaged in other duties, her hours were usually spent in her low sewing-chair, gazing out through the mouldy archways of the side gal-

lery, which opened on the garden, while her fingers were busy with a piece of tatting as unending as the visionary schemes and hopes which momentarily offered themselves to her fancy. While the shuttle flew in and out of her work, it occasionally paused to give vindictive stabs in the air as if battling with unseen foes, and again it fell helpless in the nervous hand that guided it, seemingly borne down by the weight of hidden forces.

The scene upon which Miss Isabel daily gazed was certainly forlorn enough to inspire melancholy. The garden had once been laid out in the circles, diamonds, stars, and hearts which had pleased the taste of a past generation. It was now overgrown with weeds; the borders were broken and almost obliterated. General neglect was noticeable, except along certain walks which old Celine, after the fashion of her early days, kept fresh and sweet by a daily coat of pounded brick. A fig-tree which might have been as old as Celine herself ornamented one of the circles near the house. Under its shade, when her daily tasks were done, the old negress would bring her small kitchen-stool, and humbly seat herself.

Through all phases of fortune, and the wonderful changes which had taken place in her own condition, Celine had clung to the family whose slave she had been. Her age was a mystery. Time seemed to make no impression on her. Belonging to that superior class of her race one seldom sees, uniting the higher moral qualities with a regularity of feature as pronounced as the Caucasian, her face was set and immobile as a bronze cast.

With folded arms, humming all the while some melancholy air, too low to disturb her mistress's thoughts, she would sit and watch with faithful eyes the varying expression of Miss Isabel's face, growing bolder in her song as the face she studied lighted up under the inspiration of some pleasant emotion, and sinking away in sudden cadence as the light died out of it. She would as soon have thought of going with unturbaned head as of speaking without permission; and as self-communion had made Miss Isabel a silent woman, the monotony of Celine's crone was seldom disturbed.

There was another member of the family of whom Major Morant often spoke with pardonable pride as "my good son John;" but he

was making the most of life upon a moderate salary earned in one of the great cotton offices, and lived up-town in that busy section from which the old district seemed to be separated as by an invisible barrier. Young and full of ambition, there were not many attractions for him in the old house, and though an affectionate son and brother, he made few visits to it.

Once a week there usually came a change in the drowsy routine of the household. On Sunday evenings, at precisely half-past seven o'clock, one listening intently might have heard a peculiar sound upon the banquet, like the impact of a metallic substance, and at irregular intervals a double echo of lighter sounds.

"Ah!" the old major would exclaim, with great satisfaction, as at a certain point the intelligible meaning of these sounds was conveyed to his pleased attention, "our friends are coming, my daughter. That is Burton's cane, and I would know Byrne's step in a thousand. Do you not hear them?"

"Yes, papa;" and at a sign from Miss Isabel, old Celine would glide away and presently usher in two old gentlemen.

## CHAPTER II.

OLD age clings with tenacity to certain associations, and be the actuating motive no profounder than habit, it is always suggestive of a divine constancy in human nature which affects one agreeably, and makes it a pleasant thing to see good-fellowship kept in constant repair. Concerning the old men who met weekly at the major's house, it may be said that their friendship had extended over the greater period of their lives, and the very manner of their greeting carried conviction of its strength.

With what genial hospitality did the major always receive them! There was the grace of the old-time princely planter in the wave of his hand towards the chairs appropriated to them. The gentleman who usually fell into his, with his legs astride the seat, and his arms kimbo on the back, was Mr. Burton, a very small man, who took all the liberties accorded to small people.

His thick neck almost lost in his round shoulders, his loud voice and uncultured accent, were no less remarkable than his short stature, and suggested an origin inferior to that of the courtly major. But such small defects had been compensated by an ample fortune. With wealth as a standard of respectability, his successful career as a great cotton factor had placed him on secure social footing. A grand mansion up-town challenged the admiration of every one, and settled the standing of a host of children and grandchildren. His face was full of good-humor, while at the broadest, most prominent part of it a pair of restless brown eyes, set under heavy shaggy eyebrows, disclosed the spirit of the merchant, keen to divine the motives of others while guarding against a betrayal of his own. The inclination of his mouth to open at one corner and show a semicircular shortening of the teeth was the result, probably, of the cigar on which he constantly chewed as he smoked. In the absence of the cigar, a convulsive movement of the lip kept up the imaginary work, and brought down one of his eyelids every few moments in a waggish wink.



This movement was often a source of annoyance to Mr. Byrne, an irascible Irishman, who was something of a philosopher, and indulged a propensity to lengthy discussion whenever his friends gave him a chance. Conversation sometimes came to a pause in the midst of serious subjects to enable Mr. Burton to explain. Happily Mr. Byrne could be readily appeased, and harmony was never long disturbed.

He was a bachelor, and with greater wealth he had probably more namesakes than Mr. Burton with all his descendants. There were some subjects on which he was particularly secretive. The mystery of his early environment he buried in his own breast, and with it all reckoning of his age.

Miss Isabel always took good care to retire after exchanging greetings with the gentlemen, much to Mr. Byrne's satisfaction; not that he was averse to Miss Isabel, but he had long since ceased to feel interested in any woman, and found one simply in the way.

The very tide which had swept away the major's fortune had borne his commercial

friends on to greater prosperity; but through all circumstances their pleasant relations had been uninterrupted. How they enjoyed their weekly meetings! To younger men were left the stories of lost campaigns, the anxious scanning of the political sky upon which there was just beginning to dawn a single gleam of light, the forecasting a future issuing from the overthrow of sacred doctrines and cherished traditions; but these old men talked of their youth. There was no story or racy gossip of its by-gones which failed to receive its due share of attention, each repetition enhancing the value of the story and adding flavor to the gossip.

Many of the major's relatives had owned large sugar estates contiguous to the city, but his interests had been centred in a fine cotton plantation in one of the more northern parishes of the State.

He delighted in recurring to the days when he had been in the habit of taking parties of his friends up to the place, and entertaining them there in the old free-hearted, hospitable way of the times.

At mention of it, an enthusiastic interest



always manifested itself on the part of those who had shared its pleasures.

One evening, after an animated discussion of its former attractions, Mr. Burton asked the major if he still owned the old plantation.

"Yes," he answered, "it is still mine, but it is utterly valueless. I suppose I could not rid myself of it, if I wanted to give it away. Of course I am too poor to hold on to the place for the sentiment of the thing, but I have always clung, and still cling, to the hope that fortune will smile on it again some day. It is only a question of time."

"I have never been able to realize the immense depreciation of that sort of property," said Burton, "though I've dropped money enough on it to open my eyes."

"Ah!" said Byrne, in a tone of mild triumph, "you should have listened to my warnings. I foresaw the result of a demoralized—"

Mr. Burton's eyelid came down in a way that caused Mr. Byrne to hesitate, while the major continued, with a half-drawn sigh,

"I have not seen the place for years. It has been overflowed so often that it is almost a wilderness again. Cotton-woods have grown

up in the roads where we used to drive, and I suppose it would be hard to recognize any of the old landmarks. The place needs a big lever and young blood to manage it;" and the major sighed again, while Burton laughingly remarked,

"Our blood was young enough, Morant, when we used to drive your piebald mustangs. Do you remember the way they brought us home from Billy Bush's poker-party?"

"Certainly I do," chuckled the major. "It must have been the thought of Billy's last bobtail flush which made us oblivious of the risks we were running."

There was the memory of a conclusion to that race which made the major involuntarily rub his bald head.

"Poor Billy!" said Byrne, reflectively, "what a splendid fellow he was!—to have wasted his life as he did!"

"Wasted it!" echoed the major, in surprise. "Why, if anybody ever got out of life all that it is worth, I think he did."

"Yes," said Byrne, "probably everything but an easy conscience."

“Well,” said the major, with a shrug, “every one has his own interpretation of an easy conscience. I am not skilled in defining one, and I doubt my ability to mark out a course by which to acquire one; but though no judge of a man’s conscience, I am a judge of his ability to attain the best of everything that the world proclaims worth a struggle.”

“You must acknowledge,” said Byrne, “that the limit of Billy’s struggles was the pursuit of pleasure.”

“What man could have resisted the temptations he had?” responded the major. “In the first place, he was a bachelor—”

“You ought to recognize the favorableness of that condition,” interjected Burton, with a merry twinkle of the eye and a glance at Byrne.

“And,” continued the major, “though he was an old man when we first knew him, his physique was so superb that he never broke down under any amount of dissipation. You both know how well he talked. I have heard many say that he had the English classics at his tongue’s end. Then he was master of more slaves than any man in the country, and

was by long odds the best poker-player I ever knew. A record of incentives to his own way hard to beat if a man needed excuses ; eh, Burton ?”

“ Yes,” replied Burton ; “ and I think you have not exaggerated a single item. What a giant he was ! The finest-looking fellow I ever saw ! He towered so high above most men that he dwarfed them. He must have been six feet six, and I think his heart was as big as his body.”

“ I grant all you say,” said Byrne. “ That he was rich, cultivated, generous to a fault, and wielded unbounded influence over those who gathered around him, there is no disputing ; yet he made no use of all his great gifts, except to ruin the weaker men who looked up to him as a sort of demigod whose example it was glorious to follow. He had many opportunities, and never hesitated to take advantage of them to gratify all his sensuous nature, holding himself responsible to neither God nor man.”

“ Oh !” said the major, suddenly, “ you are thinking of that old scandal. I never believed a word of that. It could not have been true.”

"I always believed it," responded Byrne; "but as his friends condoned even that offence, I never discussed the affair with them."

Burton ceased for an instant his interminable champ upon his cigar, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What! speaking of Bush as if he had done a disgraceful thing! Why, I thought he was the soul of honor. What was it?"

"Did you never hear that story?"

The major drew his chair nearer and lowered his voice. Though the man of whom they spoke had been in his grave for years, men still talked under their breath of his failings.

"They said"—the major paused in the very beginning of the story, as if he dreaded to sully the name of his dead friend by its ruthless recital—"that he had been guilty of an act which ought to have branded him with infamy. His mother had married again after his father's death, and was a widow once more, living in an adjoining State upon a handsome plantation left her by her second husband. She was a sweet, simple-minded woman, who believed in and adored her son. He sent to

her, for motherly care and affection, a little child, urging its adoption by her under his step-father's name. The explanation he offered was, that he had been privately married to the child's mother, who had died at its birth, and," continued the major, sinking his voice still lower—"they said it was false; that the child's mother could not have been his wife, for she was—his slave."

Burton drew a deep breath, while the major looked at him as if deprecating any expression of opinion, and added, hurriedly,

"There was nothing really known of the matter. It was all rumor, and because he died one night in his bed, as we know he would have best liked to have died, quickly, silently, with no man's eye to witness the death struggle, they said it was—suicide."

A profound silence fell upon them. Well might they think upon it, for what can equal in audacity the suicide of a *blasé*? He exhausts at a few draughts the precious wine of life, and then throws the cup into the face of the Giver. Burton seemed stunned, while Byrne caressed his smooth-shaven and wrinkled cheek with nervous hands. At length he



broke out with angry emphasis as the first point of the story recurred to him.

"It was shameful! the truth ought to have been reached in some way."

"Well," said the major, "nobody cared to prove the story. Billy was an idol not to be easily broken. If the facts had been established, half his friends would have closed their eyes to them."

"I do not know what I would have thought of it forty years ago," said Burton. "Probably I would have been as indignant as Byrne; but I have had a good many cherished notions knocked out of me. In the light of the present, when the amelioration of every man's condition is the only doctrine taught, I might be tempted to call his action chivalrous."

"Chivalrous!" repeated Byrne, springing bolt upright; but catching a glimpse of Burton's mocking eye, he added, "You cannot mean it; and it is idle for you to try to convince us that you have adopted theories which would advance an individual at the expense of a whole race. If the consequences of Billy Bush's act were to have affected only himself and the child, there might have been some ex-

cuse for his deception ; but there was the possible future to some unsuspecting family in marriage. Think of the never-ending misfortune of such an alliance ! Ah !” continued Byrne, in suppressed excitement, “I thank God I have no descendants to run any such risks.”

Major Morant looked grave, but Burton laughingly remarked,

“You take the matter too seriously, and think too much of genealogy. In this glorious country it does not matter much where a family begins, so it ends well. Given wealth and beauty, and who will care to trace descent ?”

The major turned sharply upon Burton, as if to controvert his assertion, but the Irishman was readier than he. For the first time in all their acquaintance he defined himself Celtic to the core, and aglow with undying prejudices.

“I pity the future of what you call this glorious country if that be true. My immortal countryman well says, ‘Those will not look forward to their posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.’ Fraud and force



may seem to effect much in making all men free and equal, but there is no such thing in natural law. There will be men who will remain true to the instincts planted in their hearts by ages of human endeavor. The light which illumines their souls comes straight and true from the divine type towards which they are progressing. They will never dim its brightness by a return through lower channels to the darkness of generations behind them in human development. I do not think I take this matter too seriously. In spite of wealth and culture, Nature will assert herself. Hereditary descent stamps the man, and one can never be sure when race characteristics will entirely disappear. They may crop out like some hideous deformity in any generation. Let me read you an extract which I clipped a few days ago from a scientific journal about a curious physiological law—"

"Come, Byrne," interposed Burton, "if you are going into that sort of thing, I'm off. Morant will listen, but physiology isn't my forte."

"Stay," said the major, as he saw a cloud gather upon Byrne's face, "don't go just yet,

and we will see if we can find something more to your taste." He rose and led the way to the dining-room. From the little old-fashioned sideboard they took the best the major could offer them, and touched their glasses amicably together in the old-time way.

## CHAPTER III.

JOHN MORANT'S entrance into a cotton merchant's counting-room marked a departure from all the cherished traditions of his family, whose sons had been gentlemen of leisure for so many generations, that one might well pardon them for believing it to have been a condition fixed from the beginning; but to the young man whose income was reduced to fractional currency, a desk in a great factor's office was no small thing, and infinitely better than indigent idleness.

If circumstances had been favorable, his tastes would probably have led him to pursue a literary or scientific career; but he straightened himself bravely in the pathway which fate had determined for him, and enjoyed its steady remunerative labor and illimitable possibilities. The value of wealth impressed itself more and more upon him as he struggled for it, and those who knew him well predicted for him a successful future. He entered

upon the new business with the ardor of one undaunted by failure, mastered quickly its details, and shrank from no amount of work imposed by it. The period was one of great commercial activity; the date of a reaction from long repressed trade, and the renewal of confidence in the sovereignty of the great staple upon which it was based. There was a wide-spread feeling that the golden day of prosperity which seemed about to dawn, was a compensation for the dark hours which had preceded it. A kind of delirious joy filled the hearts of those who had felt nothing but despair, but who suddenly saw the cloud lifted, and the light shining once more upon field and hearth-stone. It was true that new men and new methods were coming to the front, but the golden hour was not to be dimmed by retrospective memories. Men forgot their losses in the evanescent brilliancy of their new hopes.

There had passed away from the commercial world many prominent figures; first of all, the pleasant old merchant whose name remains to this day in the whole Mississippi valley a by-word of wonderful success. Gossip

declared that he secured the lion's share of each year's shipment through the influence of church fellowship, and by the assiduous cultivation of Brother So-and-so's pious sympathy, amassed the fortune which enabled his only son to startle all Paris by his extravagances. Alas! that church-fellowship and Brother So-and-so's sympathy should be also a thing of the past. Another merchant whose famous bet on the extent of a cotton crop was the first spark of that speculative mania which was afterwards to devour men, and others who had grown rich on the increasing values of mortgaged lands and human chattels, had gone down in the mighty struggle which swept away their securities.

Fortune's wheel had made a confusing turn.

Away from Carondelet Street and its environs, which had hitherto claimed a monopoly of the cotton interests, in the midst of the less aristocratic region of pork, flour, and potatoes on Poydras Street, there had arisen a firm which was destined to play an important part in assisting to revive the languishing estates of impoverished planters.

To have seen the worn stair-way leading to a second story office in one of the dingiest buildings on the street, one would have immediately concluded that it had reached its present state through the attrition of feet bearing heavier burdens than the fleecy samples laid upon the tables in the rooms above. There might have been an appreciable effect from the burden of anxious hearts going up that way to a first interview with the senior partner of Green, Waters & Co., but certainly none when they descended with the privilege of drawing upon the benevolent old gentleman for blank thousands.

A sad thing that generous confidence should have had so poor a return! Of all the thousands of dollars sent out that way, there came back no tidings save in the form of overdrawn accounts and promises-to-pay, vitiated by the all-powerful bankrupt law.

Behind the wooden railing enclosing the busy workers at correspondence, account of sales, and ledger, John Morant sat at his desk and witnessed the close of many an interview, sometimes humorous, sometimes indignant, and alas! sometimes deeply pathetic.



The number of applications for means to plant the magnificent lands still left to once princely planters was incredible. There came the owners of Villa Vistas, Linwoods, Sunnysides, and many other places with beautiful and fanciful names, each with demands commensurate to the unlimited credit hitherto accorded them. There were times when the senior partner hesitated and looked thoughtful.

"Can you not make a lower estimate of expenses for Villa Vista? Is it not possible to do with less?"

"Impossible! One must live, you know, while one works."

"You will manage the place yourself, of course?"

"Why should I? There is no necessity for it. I have the best overseer in the world, and Villa Vista will give us a famous crop."

Borne down by such arguments as these, the good old man paid out exorbitant sums without a murmur. As a matter of fact, cotton was worth fifty cents a pound, and for the little matter of spending money before it was made, that was the old way which must be endured. Times and men might change, but

the cotton-planter remained fixed, "*In statu quo ante bellum.*"

Each day added to the number of importunate customers. There came men with large ideas, men with small ones; conservative men, such as had served under others, and now counting the cost took the master's place quietly and resolutely; reckless men fresh from sacrifices so grand, yet so futile, that nothing could now content them save an opportunity of showing how far they might swing in the opposite direction; widows old and young, shrewd, calculating ones and timid ones; and strangest of all sights in that busy office, a young girl, the sole representative of an invalid mother, who applied for means to begin work on the land which was her only resource.

John remembered long her attitude and expression as she stood gazing into the old man's face, which in her case emphasized an adverse decision. By her side was a lawyer who had failed to plead her cause successfully in the face of the supreme fact that even then the plantation offered was trembling at every dash of the river against its banks.



"We have reached the limit of our ability to make advances even on the best security."

The young girl turned with a gesture of despair. The tears which modest timidity had held upon the verge of her heavily fringed eyelids overflowed, and one big, bright drop flashed upon her round cheek just where the senior partner's eye could catch its reflection.

The never-failing miracle was wrought. The innermost spring of the old man's heart was touched. It gushed forth in sympathetic assurance. "Well, well, my dear, we will try our best, but your mother must manage economically."

Tears and kindly sympathy were infinitely superior to a lawyer's pleadings, but for all that, there was at the end of the season a deficit—not upon the lawyer's books.

It was a novel experience for John Morant to watch with critical eyes from a new standpoint the class with which his interests had always been identified, and the knowledge gained was of value all his life afterwards.

As a disinterested observer, he found the demands made so lightly, so ignorantly, so

trustfully, unconscious of risk in venturing upon untried schemes, scarcely less marvellous than the fact of one man paying out daily thousands of hard-earned dollars upon promises-to-pay and securities as worthless as the buoyant boasts of the borrowers.

All the habits of indolence which were his heritage seemed to fill him with disgust and to fall away from him as he plodded on at his systematic work; and as the months went by, closing the busy season, the short, quick season into which was condensed the almost herculean labor of receiving and disposing of a mighty agricultural product, an instinct of shame seized upon him for the people, his people, who should have been the regenerators of a desolated land, but whose lying, boastful, extravagant accounts were to be the ruin of the men who trusted and aided them. The sense of moral obligation quickened and grew with him into vigorous life. Come what might to him, there would be no danger that a pledge of his would ever be dishonored.

When relieved from the daily routine of business, John plunged with enthusiasm into the social gayeties of a city which had always

sustained a reputation for superiority in such matters.

He felt his poverty keenly at times, the more so because his inherent generosity made him often prodigal of his small means—a fact which did not lessen his reputation as a marvellously good fellow, whatever other results it worked.

With a frank and pleasant face, and the confidence of brave and honorable descent, he carried the defences of society boldly. At his club, at the opera, as in the evening dances, John Morant was no more the daily worker, but a young prince minus a principality. His personal appearance enhanced his charm of manner. The majority of creoles being small of stature, his tall, well-knit figure was more than ordinarily striking. There was a well-bred look in his slightly Roman nose, and his handsome blue eyes looked out from under a brow shaded by jet-black hair, one lock of which, either by accident or intent, perhaps the result of one of the small decorative instincts which men have not entirely lost, was twisted into a veritable curl just over the left eyebrow. This curl

had been a source of annoyance to some of his friends, and of ridicule to others, but certainly it did not detract from a face which was manly enough to look well under it.

"His affectation in the matter of that curl," jestingly remarked Dr. Edward Dickson, his special friend and keenest critic, "is not without advantage. No woman ever failed to smile upon that return to the classic ideal, the glorious head of the race when it was young. A discussion of his popularity would quickly determine that fact."

"Shave his head as close as a Mongolian's," said another, "and he will receive the same smiles. He belongs to a type which women recognize as the best, without any clearer index than a certain sympathy in that direction."

His friends were right respecting the current of women's sympathy. It tended steadily in John Morant's favor. And he had been conscious of it, and enjoyed it as he did all the social pleasures he seemed eminently fitted to enjoy; but of late there had come to him a certain knowledge that it was one woman's smile alone which could fill him with vague unrest.

He had not thought three months ago to have been moved by any sentiment outside his great purpose to succeed in the daily work he had chosen. Of the first inconsiderable touch in shaping his fancy he had been less conscious than of the extra beat of his pulse when he remembered it.

It chanced that in the early days of January he attended Madam Noye's grand ball, to which so many invitations were sent out that disappointed ones called it a "Directory party."

This ball had been the culmination of Madam Noye's triumphant progress towards the position of leader in a circle to which she had very recently gained access. It was another of the dizzy turns of fortune's wheel which had brought her out of a second story back room in a Camp Street boarding-house to the occupancy of one of the finest establishments in the city, and she made a bold effort to secure recognition.

With the thirst of long abstinence created by the war, society was in a condition to drink deeply of pleasure and to be but slightly critical of those who presented it. Exclu-

sive sets condescendingly met the extreme limits of gentility, while the illuminative power of the splendid drawing-rooms dazzled and blinded the guests to everything but the great and particular glory of the hour, which saw a return to gayeties no longer charged with a mockery of sadly tinged surroundings.

John noted a few particular friends, and then made his way to the side of Miss Murray, the only unmarried one of a group of pretty, blond sisters whose successive marriages had been important events in the social world. She received him in a charmingly cordial and enthusiastic manner.

"Ah! is it you? I am so glad you are come. Isn't it a crush? They say you know everything and everybody worth knowing; prove it by telling me the name of that pretty *débutante*. No, not that one," she exclaimed, with a slight spreading of her high-arched nostrils, as a young girl in white went by on the arm of a young gentleman whose chief recommendation was a steady limb, which formed an excellent pivot in the new waltz. "It is she in that group on the left, towards whom all the old, as well as all the young



men are gravitating. I fancy she makes a distinction in favor of the former. There! I am sure of it. What a little humbug! She has captured the general."

As the couple advanced nearer their point of view, John admired the willowy grace of the slender female figure beside the gallant officer. So marked was the advantage gained by such escort that one might be tempted to believe with the old-young lady who had calculated the probabilities of the case, that skilful management had secured the position.

With his grave, quiet face, heavy gray mustache, and short stature, the general was not more distinguished-looking than the average cultured gentleman; but a sentiment still quick in the hearts of that assemblage made him the prominent figure of it, and lent an interest to any lady who commanded his attention. One had need of grace and beauty to share jointly the admiration of eyes used to being loyally centred upon one important personage.

If John Morant had been asked to name the chiefest charm of the pretty stranger, he would have responded at once, "motion."



There was no apparent effort or restraint in the light, floating step, and the easy yielding of the supple waist to every movement. In the free gait was visible the perfect accommodation of the physical forces. An almost infantine grace, the grace of unconscious youth, was associated with the symmetrically moulded figure of maturer development. The light seemed to concentrate itself upon the lustrous white of the dress she wore, and shed a radiance with each soft rustle of its folds, while a joyous little laugh, uttered in a musical undertone, supplemented a quick glow of interest upon a face as merry and frank as that of a child, and certainly very beautiful. Her hair and eyes were dark and lovely. Her complexion was cream-and-pink, rather than lily-and-rose. Her mouth and teeth were perfect. The general pose of the head was superb. Her smile was exceedingly winning, and her general expression was charming.

As she passed on and disappeared in the crowd, Miss Murray again claimed his attention in a voice oppressively high and shrill.

“So my curiosity must remain ungratified!

It is certainly disappointing to find you falling short of your reputation. You have had a brilliant opportunity and have lost it."

"A damaging confession, I own," said John, bowing with mock humility, "but one I am compelled to make. I suppose my prestige is utterly gone."

"That depends on whether you care to sustain it," responded Miss Murray, smiling at him from over the shoulder of a fat little man with a bald crown, who, privileged by years of devotion, had taken the liberty of silently placing his arm about her waist as an invitation to waltz. "I predict that you will hasten to retrieve it, and I leave you to gravitate with all the rest towards the new centre." Nodding archly she disappeared, with the long, smooth dip of the last new waltz.

John hesitated a moment before leaving the spot. He was conscious of a slight sensation of annoyance. He had meditated a conclusion not unlike that suggested by Miss Murray, but her light banter and significant nod had invested the design with a factitious importance, and made it for the moment distaste-

ful. There might now be limitations to his passing fancy.

To and fro through the long drawing-rooms the crowd passed in promenade and dance, while he stood balancing the feather-weight of a social consideration. The music swelled and then died away in a pianissimo, almost lost in the light laughter and murmur of voices.

A fragment of conversation floated towards him from a group on the left.

"Just back from a residence in England, did you say? Impossible! There is nothing English about her."

"Pardon. It is her papa quite op'oseete. He meks a nize-looking Engleeshman, I theenk."

"Ah! there is no disputing his type; but she— I am mystified. One might readily account for the Paris costume; but the air, the grace with which it is worn, that belongs only to a Frenchwoman, or to one of French stock planted on kindly soil."

"It is one creole, you mean, the las' one you spik about. Thenk you; it is kin' fo' you to spik like that. I am creole myself.

But she is not creole, I can asshu' you, though she is preetie and something lige."

John's interest quickened.

In the last speaker he recognized a charming woman, the fair representative of a class fast disappearing from social circles, a creole matron with an historic name, one whose humorous fancy and incisive speech were enhanced by her peculiar accent and construction of the English delivered through that most beautiful and effective medium, a soft, musical voice.

Of whom were they speaking? Surely of that young girl whose rare attractions had moved others besides himself to open admiration. Who was she?

Chance favored him by throwing him into a group as some one mentioned her name—Miss Muir. At once he remembered having heard of her as the daughter of a wealthy Englishman, a widower, who had brought his child to visit relatives and friends of her mother in the South, and had ended by taking up his residence in a city whose position was favorable to the great commercial interests which he represented.

With wealth, brilliant introductions, and beauty, a bright future opened before the young girl. The respect which these advantages commanded among a pleasure-loving people gave her a distinguished position. She became a favorite. In placing himself among those who surrounded her, John entered a circle disposed to concede her superiority in everything—an enviable recognition rarely obtained by a woman except she be haloed by youth, beauty, and adventitious circumstance. And as full-voiced admiration is a semblance of the divine passion which evokes all that is beautiful in human nature, it warmed her heart and stimulated her to charming ways which made her more winning still.

The winter days swept by, and their completed effect became clear to John, when he acknowledged to himself that their most delicious moments were those spent by Bamma Muir's side.

The festive garb which the city assumed; the private entertainments, crowded upon each other in quick succession like a series of panoramic pictures, save that the scenes were always the same—the same decorations, the same

glare of lights, the same guests; the opera nights, when a great tenor sang to audiences who shouted with enthusiasm over a high C in "Trovatore;" the carnival, celebrated with more than usual splendor, because of the previous dark years of the war, when the fun-loving "Krewe" had been forced to hide in the sombre shadows that compassed the land—all contributed to a season of almost mad exhilaration.

More consonant seemed its mood with all John's newly awakened emotions, when in a single day its merriment was subdued to lenten tones, the quality of its gayety attuned to the stillness of cathedral aisles.

The crowds upon the street were the same, and yet not the same. The moral expression seemed changed. With the climax of their boisterous mirth had disappeared every trace of cap and bells, and the impression conveyed to an observer was one of almost puritan peacefulness.

Such is New Orleans after its Mardi-gras festivities!



## CHAPTER IV.

THE breeze which comes and goes in the city of New Orleans with the regularity of the ocean tide, and blows especially cool and pleasant through the thoroughfares running from the river front back to the broad Lake Pontchartrain in the rear, had just swept with one smart gust along the streets, and then left the trees and shrubs in the pretty gardens of the upper district motionless.

It was time for those in-doors to emerge and catch its first appreciable return.

John Morant settled his hat upon his head as comfortably as its stiff proportions would allow, and grasping his fragile cane with a degree of satisfaction at its finish and slenderness, sallied forth.

His mood was one which held an inveterate antagonism of companionship, and he rejoiced in the prospect of being alone just so long as he chose to enjoy it.

He was restless under the influence of pe-



culiar emotions which had swayed him for weeks past, to the exclusion of interest in anything beyond certain absorbing limitations. He had reached that point where the necessity for sympathy was absolute, and he determined to have a quiet talk with his sister Isabel, secure, at least, of unbounded interest in his confidences, if not of unmixed approbation.

He went his way past the gay shops which even on this Sunday afternoon were open to buyers, who chattered and bargained over the counters with the enthusiasm of small dealers, past all evidence of active, busy life, into the solemn stillness of the streets where the old houses, with a tendency to gravitate towards each other, hugged the gloom, and with closed shutters blindly waited the coming night. There was little to attract him in these surroundings, and he became more and more absorbed in reflections which made him oblivious of time and place.

In this quiet atmosphere he seemed to have a clearer vision of certain anticipated relations of life which held out the fairest promises of love and prosperity.

The shadows of the old houses lengthened,

but they failed to cast upon him the drony listlessness which enchanted their tenants, or to dim the brightness of his mental pictures. From this state of pleasant exaltation he was suddenly aroused by a low growl, which fell upon his ear with startling distinctness.

He turned quickly to find himself facing a small, low shop, whose air of wretchedness and decay harmonized with the strange assortment of articles displayed in the one dirty window. Occupying the place of honor in the centre of the odd medley, was a small stuffed alligator, with open jaws and ferocious show of teeth. Above it perched a small brown owl, guiltless of the usual wise and solemn expression of its kind; for a tuft of feathers on either side of its head, like ears, gave it the cunning look of a cat. Higher still was a wild duck, the soft feathers of its beautiful head and neck glowing with greenish lustre. There was a huge bunch of dusty white coral, the broken bone of a stingaree, and some sea shells. On the facing of the door-way, in almost illegible letters, one could trace part of a name, and below it an announcement in French that all sorts of taxidermic work could

be done there. The half sash door was partly open, and glancing inside, John saw a small wooden cage containing a fine young tiger. Struck by the beauty of the animal, and the oddity of its presence in that quarter, he pushed open the door and entered the shop.

A stifling odor greeted him, but enduring its discomforts he glanced around with curiosity. The tiger and two or three strange-looking birds were the only living occupants in view. Piles of empty boxes and dusty glass cases obstructed the centre of the room, leaving only a narrow passage-way to a small door in the rear. On one side was a row of shelves reaching to the ceiling, with glass doors, behind which were seen, covered with the dust of years, a stuffed coon and grinning monkey, with a huge wax doll strung up beside them, a well preserved terrier, and two or three moth-eaten canaries, whose melancholy aspect protested against such immortality. In one corner was piled a lot of skins dressed for use. The rows of shelves were repeated upon the opposite side of the room, and were filled with boxes, queer-looking blocks of wood, mosses, leaves, and dried grasses.

“Mo’su’ wan’ som’ting nize fo’ stuff? one nize lill’ howl, heh?”

John started. A little man had come through the rear door, and stood gazing at him with keen expectancy.

His entrance was so noiseless, and his appearance so peculiar, that John scarcely heeded what he said. Barely over four feet in height, the man’s broad, square shoulders might have graced a giant. He had a large, round, good-humored face, a pair of small bright gray eyes, and hair that stood out from his great head like the ruffled feathers of one of his own strange birds.

“Som’ting nize fo’ stuff, heh?” repeated the little man.

“No,” said John; “I came in to have a good look at that splendid young tiger. Where did you get it?”

“Ah! he’s one nize tige’, ent he? One fren’ sen’ heem to me when he was lill’ come ça,” measuring the wonderfully small size between his outstretched hands. “He say he good fo’ stuff; but I loog at heem an’ say, Non; I keep heem till he gro’ mo’ big an’ strong. Mebbe I mek a meestak’ becos his

happeti' is mo' strong an' he. 'Tis terreabl'. If it was not fo' Marie—" He turned his head on one side and waved his hand towards the pile of skins. "But she is my lill' wife, and liges heem. 'Tis true, mo'su', she liges heem. She will show you how he kin eat. Marie, Marie!"

In response to the call, a little, sallow-faced, black-eyed woman came in, trailing the flounces of her long, loose wrapper with the grace and abandon of a grand-duchess.

"What fo' you call me, Emile?" The little woman smiled as she came forward. Evidently the best feeling existed between the two, a *camaraderie* seldom seen except with that race and class which makes the woman a working partner, equally responsible in every business transaction, sharer of the man's cares, and by force of habit, if not of sympathy, participator in his pleasures.

"Come, Marie, mo'su' is pleas' wi' the tige'. He must see how he kin eat."

"Ah! oui," she exclaimed, with a delighted intonation, as if feeding the tiger was an unspeakable pleasure. She disappeared for an instant, and returned with a large piece of

raw meat, which she bestowed with great care upon the growling young animal.

As the man and woman watched him devour it, they laughed with all the gleefulness of children at their strange pet. When the last remnant of food had disappeared, the two looked at each other gravely. The woman sighed, and the man responded to it.

“Mais, Marie, we ought to stuff heem! He will gro’ too big!”

John turned to go, but the little man touched him on the arm.

“Attendez, mo’su’, if you is pleas’ I would lige to sho’ yo’ som’ting helse.”

Opening the rear door, he led the way through a room which was a duplicate of the front one in the way of dust and odors, then out on a gallery and into a small court-yard. The open air was like a breath of heaven when contrasted with the rooms just vacated.

The freshly reddened bricks suggested cleanliness unknown inside. Large green boxes, arranged against the outside walls, were filled with growing plants, whose blossoms perfumed the air. Just under the hydrant and over a small drain was a great tub filled with water-



lilies. In one corner an oleander blossomed, in another a huge agave spread out its barbed waxen leaves.

Noting John's look of pleased surprise, the little man said,

"Oui, mo'su', when I work I work, and think of nothing helse; but out here it is where I take my plaisir."

He whistled, and a mocking-bird came floating down from somewhere, and settled on his shoulder.

"Thes' is my Marie's pet. She must mek' heem sing fo' you."

Marie came obedient to the front, and called the bird softly, chérie! chérie! He circled around a moment, and then perched on her forefinger. She began humming a simple French waltz, when suddenly the bird took up the air and carolled it forth in full musical tones.

"Yes, he is one fin' bird, an' Marie ligen heem, but he's not som'ting strange, lige I want sho' you."

In the shade of a crape-myrtle was a large, handsome cage swinging by a cord from one of the branches, and inside of it, a slender,



graceful white bird, resting quite still upon its perch, with its head turned on one side, and peering curiously out of its bright eyes.

“He is som’ting strange, eh?”

“I never saw anything like him.”

“Non? An’ mebbe nevva will,” said the little man, drawing himself up to his full tip-toe height, and coming down again with emphasis upon his heels. “He’s what you call one freak, an’ no mo’ lige heem in the contree. He’s one white blackbird.”

“Ah!” said John. “You ought to exhibit him. He would probably bring you in more money than your shop with all its stuffed birds and skins and other curiosities.”

“Non, non!” said the little man, somewhat resentfully; “I ham no sho’man. My Marie an’ me, we lov’ hour lill’ shop, we hav’ all we wan’; for mo’ monaie”—he sank his head between his shoulders, threw out his elbows at right angles, and turned his broad hands upward—“we doan’ care. Long time I had som’ birds fo’ sell; mais Marie she feed heem an’ lov’ heem, an’ when som’ customaire com’, she say, ‘Doan’ sell heem;’ an’ som’ mo’ com,’ an’ she say, ‘Doan’ sell heem;’ till one da’ I geev’

up an' say, 'We doan' mek' som' monaie lige these,' an' I buy nothin' mo' fo' sell but som' skin an' som' curhosities. Now these lill' shop is ours, these yard, these lill' birds, an' we are happy. I would not try som'ting helse, fo' we doan' know." The inevitable shrug emphasized his meaning. "But," he added, apologetically, "I ham glad to sho' my birds to anybodie who is pleas'."

John was more interested in the taxidermist than in ornithology, but he pursued the subject which most delighted the little man.

"You say the bird is rare; have you never heard of another like him?"

"Mais, oui, mo'su'. There was one in Paris, once; he died in the Penétentier. You laf, mo'su', but all the same hit was tru'. He was own by one marquise. One da' de kedge do' was lef' hopen an' he disappear. You ma' be shu' he was foun' an' pick up by somebodie. Then there was trub'. He was va'u'ble, an' made one great case in court. Lawsuits! Yes, many! He was seiz' by the police, an' he go to preeson, all becos of de color. Between them all, po lill' bird he geev' up and die."

"They stuffed him, of course," said John, continuing to humor the little man's fancy, "and gave him a place of honor."

"Non! He belonged to nobodie, an' they was stupid; but plenty, yes plenty went to see him when he was dead."

The bird on the perch uttered a subdued croak, and the little man, elevating his chin, responded with a brisk chirrup, then continued:

"One da' I say to Marie, 'Marie, our lill' bird loogs lonely. If his feather is w'ite, he is one blackbird after all. We will gif him som' compagnie.' Mais, mon Dieu, hees color did not suit the compagnie! My lill' bird he go to the corner, while the compagnie sit on the perch an' not look at all plaisant. I say, 'Marie, 'tis impossib'; Nature is mo' strong 'han we. Po' lill' bird! He kin nevver fin' his own feather. He has no mate. He is ver' lonely.'"

So the little man chattered on until John took his way through the shop into the street again. The obscurity of the night, which had precipitated itself suddenly, the darkness, which every inanimate object exhaled, the absence of all sounds, served to increase a peculiar men-

tal impression he received. As he walked along he seemed to hear a refrain ringing, now comically, and again pathetically, "Po' lill' bird. He has no mate. He is ver' lonely."

The incident amused him, and a smile still lingered on his face as he closed the door of the old house behind him and sought his sister.

## CHAPTER V.

MISS ISABEL always heard the faint clink of glasses in the dining-room with a sensation of relief. It was the signal announcing the approaching departure of her father's guests. The visits of the old men emphasized her loneliness. While they drifted away in their discussions to a remote past, her isolation was complete. She might have fallen into a state of utter despondency, and felt more keenly the oppressiveness of her vacant life, but she was blessed with that wonderful faculty frequently found in her sex, an imagination so vivid that it constructed for her an ideal world into which she entered at will, with surroundings and effects that satisfied her most ambitious longings.

Notwithstanding the fact that she had long passed the romantic age, she had visions of social triumphs and delights as gorgeous and full of changes as her real life was monotonous and dreary. One might have wished

nothing better than such abstract happiness; but the sustaining power was unequal to outside pressure. Her beautiful world had a habit of vanishing whenever she caught the drone of voices not in harmony with her ideals, and her sighs punctuated the periods.

Her dreams were not always selfish. It is doubtful if the dreams of any woman are ever entirely so. The law of her development provides a sacrificial altar upon which she may offer up selfhood to some idolatrous affection, which sooner or later takes possession of her. The idol may be no higher in the scale of existence than a green parrot or a pug-dog, but merit lies in the sacrificial act.

The central figure in Miss Isabel's dreams was her brother. Her chaste fancy, purified by years of quiet domesticity, never included an alien image. She desired earnestly for him all that had been lost to the family of wealth and influence, absolutely forgetting at times to dwell upon the reflective beams which this acquired splendor might cast upon her own pathway.

How it was all to be brought about never troubled her. No wonderful series of step-



by-step struggles, to be at last crowned with success, rose before her fancy. The influences moulding most women's lives, making chance rather than personal effort the autocrat of their future, were powerful in her case, for all the chances had heretofore been in favor of the women of her generation. No wonder her trusting spirit took airy flights beyond the pale of logical sequence—commonplace adventures, after all, but full of the charm of novelty to her, with the old goddess of Good-luck always just beyond her.

While the thought of marriage for herself never obtruded itself, it was one of the chances for her brother which she builded upon and expanded until the idea assumed magnificent proportions, and became one of the flighty images which returned oftenest upon her busy fancy.

A brilliant marriage! It was no new thing in the family history, nor yet beyond the bounds of probability.

A fresh impetus was given to the thought one evening when, in the excitement of readjusting a confused idea, she very naturally readjusted her prim neat necktie. Her fingers



touched a precious heirloom in the shape of a brooch which she always wore. It was an exquisitely painted miniature of a young woman with short, dark curls, slender, oval face, brilliant black eyes, and very white shoulders rising out of misty clouds. On the reverse of the gold case was traced the name "Ameniade," the very same sweet, French name which was graven years ago on the marble slab which closed upon all that was mortal of old Madam Morant.

At the touch memory evoked many traditions of the household, not the least splendid of which clustered around the period when a young bride brought a rich dower to the old house, adding prestige to it, and setting the name she bore still higher above the ordinary level of life.

A fact in the past might be repeated in the future. Why not? Immediately a delightful little drama presented itself to Miss Isabel's mental vision, invested with an external reality of glow and color that was gorgeous and enlivening. The air was filled with joyous excitement. Emerging softly from the shadows of the old drawing-room, came a

youthful figure clad in white, with a sweet face smiling behind the diaphanous cloud which floated around her and beside her tall, handsome— Ah! surely this was no vagary of the imagination, but the real brother John who stooped and kissed her, and laughed at the bewildered look, which proved it hard to return to the boundary line of material things.

A suspicious moisture in her eyes and a half-repressed sob made him wonder if she was ever glad to see him, since his coming seemed to be a signal for tears. Miss Isabel could only respond with a smile which made her seem years younger, and her tears as sparkling as the rain-drops from a cloud through which the sun suddenly shines.

“Have the cronies gone?” he asked, with a slightly irreverent laugh.

The solemn groan of the old front door uttering its good-by note answered his question, and hearing it Miss Isabel rose and led the way to the room just deserted by the friends.

There sat the major, grayer than usual. The evening's discussion had been full of dis-

turbing influences. Byrne particularly had been uncomfortable in the revival of that long-forgotten story, in holding up that old offence of Billy Bush in the light of a cumulative wrong with disagreeable contingencies, forcing one to acknowledge that consequences might be less compassionate than the mood of the day which gave them impulse. Not that the major believed that the consequences could have any relation either nearly or remotely to himself, but they were unpleasant to keep in one's mind.

One could see that the major was troubled. In the dim light which Miss Isabel's prudent calculation of resources made advisable, with his gray locks fringing the small skull-cap which he constantly wore, and his shrunken figure lost in the ample folds of his antique dressing-gown, he looked older and feebler than usual, weighed down, perhaps, under the burden of responsibility which sometimes strangely takes possession of a man when he is confronted by the evil to which he has been dumb, and which suddenly voices itself.

What relief to throw it all aside in the new greeting, the coming of his son whom he em-

braced with a new tenderness, his youngest born, the Benjamin of his old age! Solaced by his presence, the major's light-hearted, merrily nature seemed to rise above the infirmities of age and the burden of circumstance. With what spirit did he enter into the minutest details of his son's plans, slight as his influence was in shaping them!

Of the mysterious undercurrent of sentiment which was bearing his son away from present sympathies he was ignorant. How could he guess that even as John talked calmly of other things, his pulse was bounding at the memory of a sweet face and the expression of a pair of wondrous eyes.

Miss Isabel alone, with womanly instinct, divined that some change had passed over him. His preoccupation, the smile with which he roused himself from some irrelevant reply, awakened her curiosity.

"John," she said, under her breath, suddenly drawing her chair closer to his side, and intently regarding him, "if I were not sure—"

He laughed heartily, and the clear, frank light in his eyes dissipated her suspicion.

Ah! but he was under the influence of a stronger, sweeter intoxicant than she suspected.

"You are in a strange mood, John. What has happened to you?"

"Nothing."

She was not satisfied with his answer, as her disturbed expression indicated. The irresistible force which impels a woman to go to the bottom of a mystery denied to her was evidently at work, and John enjoyed the contemplation of it, while he recognized the fact that he must eventually succumb to it.

"John," she at length said, in a coaxing tone, the sweetness of which was in no way impaired by her keen desire to fathom his thoughts, "tell me; you cannot deceive me. For ten minutes you have been answering papa at random. What does it mean?"

"That I am possibly sleepy."

"Nonsense."

There was energy and unsilenced curiosity in the tone.

The good old major, soothed by their confidential aside, leaned back in his comfortable chair, with a dropping of eyelids and chin

which suggested a dropping out of interest in the conversation.

Then, in pity of Miss Isabel's suspensive solicitude, John said, "You are right. There is something I wish to tell you."

"I knew it," she replied, triumphantly. "Let me guess it." And with the facility of her sex she guessed correctly.

"John, you are in love."

He changed color slightly under the force of the accusation, but the initiative of his confidential disclosure seemed by no means unpleasant.

"Well—the truth is—"

She did not give him time to explain. In her limited, mental survey the main points of interest were easy of apprehension.

"Is she lovely?"

"Perfectly."

"Rich?"

Something jarring in the word made John hesitate. Its meaning was outside the vocabulary of romantic intelligence.

"I suppose so."

"Do you mean to say that you do not know?"



There was distress and some indignation in Miss Isabel's voice, a betrayal of a shocking sense of collision between fancy and hard facts. In all her dreams there had never occurred the impetuous advent of a disastrous image.

Poor Miss Isabel! Her sympathies could reach no broader range than the field of emotion in which they had been nurtured. Were poverty and obscurity, after all, to settle down more closely around the old house, and were they to come from the point towards which she had always turned for the maintenance of all her hopes?

"Oh, John! Are you wise? are you prudent? Remember how much depends upon you."

The strength of her fears prevented her from seeing that she had wounded the self-esteem which is never more sensitive than when a man is under the influence of a passion which demands that all the advantages be on his side. It seemed the confirmation of her anxiety when John answered,

"Prudence is a possible road in the affections, but a man doesn't discover it until he



has lost himself in a more probable direction."

"At any rate, I do hope you will be happy," said Miss Isabel, with a disconsolate acceptance of facts in which she saw the accustomed pattern of her life robbed of its brightest threads.

"Cease to torment yourself with doubts of it," said John, amused at her tragic tone; and he drew such a picture of the woman he loved in her attitude towards himself rather than towards the world, that Miss Isabel once more rose to the region of romance.

This time she felt the need of larger sympathy. The sudden expansion of her mood found expression in a little shriek.

"Oh, papa, papa!"

"What is it, my daughter?" exclaimed the major, waking from the slight doze into which he had fallen, very much startled by Miss Isabel's outburst.

Receiving no prohibitory glance from John, she explained.

"Oh, papa, he is going to be married!"

"Married?" said the major, as if he did not quite believe that he had heard accurately.

“Yes, married.”

Then the major sat bolt upright, fixing his eyes wonderingly upon his son. He could not reconcile his every-day idea with this new one; his mental youngster never reaching majority with this new young man, with all the dignity of manhood asserting itself in elevated head and undaunted presence.

His need of expression was as strong as Miss Isabel's. There must have been, somewhere in his early associations, a tendency towards vigorous English, which he had compromised in the expletive to which he now gave vent—the only one he was ever known to use. “By George!”

John flushed under the profound astonishment of the tone.

“Don't pass judgment upon me just yet. My sister has jumped to a conclusion.”

“Not an unwarranted one, I presume,” said the major, slowly regaining his kindly look, and pursing his brow and mouth with the air of one who has made just the same jump.

“Perhaps not,” responded John, deprecatingly; “but there has been nothing very definite in what I have said.”

"Then we may hope that you have been as limited in declaration elsewhere," said the major, with less anxiety in his tone. "It is an affair in which one must move slowly. I do not claim your confidence, but if you choose to give it— We are ready—"

The major leaned forward with interest in every line of his good old face. He listened with the sensations of the profoundly experienced to the growing eloquence of youthful fancy.

In very defence of himself he felt finally obliged to interrupt it. The aged father no less than the romantic sister must be assured upon certain points.

"Yes, yes, we will take her beauty and fascinations upon trust. You are a good judge of such matters;" and with an indulgent smile, "a fair relater of them. But who is she? What of her family? You know we Morants hold good lineage above everything else."

"We may take that on trust too, papa," said Miss Isabel, loftily.

There was an irritating principle in Miss Isabel's supreme belief in him which roused John to criticism of the Morant creed, even

though he felt he would never be in danger of violating it.

"You have given me credit for an amount of hereditary pride which I do not possess. Beyond the fact that grandfathers lived and died I do not care to go. I am content with the merits of the present generation. For me it is enough to know that my wife will occupy the position I give her, and if she pleases me and makes me happy I will be content."

A contemplation of the superb egotism of the divine passion in its masculine phase hushed for a moment any protest on the part of the hearers.

In that moment the major felt the depression of spirits which had once before seized upon him.

Miss Isabel jumped to another conclusion.

"Papa."

"My daughter."

"There is nothing to fear. It is the stamp of the Morant pride which makes him speak as he does."

On this basis cordial humor was restored, and in the semi-darkness of the old rooms they pursued the conversation, kindly, gen-

tly, softly, the major going over the familiar ground whereon family pride had builded, emphasizing lightly here and there a ruin, but throwing over all the rosy light which age flashes prodigally only upon the pathway which lies behind it: Miss Isabel confining herself to no boundary lines, and John indulging the beautiful present, the present which held for him no shadows deeper than the changing lines of a woman's face.

Later when Miss Isabel went to her own room and unpinned her precious heirloom preparatory to putting it away in its little worn leather case, she held it an instant longer than usual in her hand, and then laid it away with a triumphant smile. It was a security of the past that had become a pledge of the future.

John, wending his way back through the sombre streets, over which the full moon was just beginning to shed her light, reflected rather discontentedly that he had expected a less materialistic view of his confessions. Was it the unselfishness or the complete selfishness of his passion which forced this conclusion of his thoughts?

“Nothing can prevent me from marrying the woman I love, if she loves me.” And as the moon rose higher and brighter, and shed a silvery radiance just across his pathway, it roused him to daring assertion, and he whispered with a smile, “I believe she does.”



## CHAPTER VI.

WHILE rust and decay took possession of the old French quarter of New Orleans, the garden district, as the people delighted to call it, blossomed in the sunshine of wealth and prosperity.

In spring days a freshness of verdure and fragrance pervaded the whole extent of it. The scent of orange-flowers, sweet olive, and violets floated up from every side. Through open windows the breeze laden with this perfume came like a diffusive elixir. Each green enclosure fronting the broad streets seemed to the passer-by like a new laboratory for the combination of Nature's sweetest odors. The great live-oaks, neighbored by stately magnolias, shaded velvety lawns and made solid comfort for the hot days of the later season. Birds nested and sang in their branches.

The houses, as a general rule, conforming to no order of architecture, and retired as far as possible from the gates and fences, might



not have claimed consideration from one drinking in the delicious delights of color, fragrance, and melody, but here and there a residence stood out from its neighbors, as if demanding criticism, and sometimes securing more than a fair share of it, maintaining its importance with the thoroughly light-hearted look of fresh white paint. If there was an expression prevailing above all others in the houses great and small, it was that of a desire to secure the deepest inspiration of the south wind. The brightest, cheeriest windows turned to that point of the compass to hail its coming.

Alfred Muir had made his selection of a home with an Englishman's instinctive tendency towards space-room for the typical elbows which occupy every inch conceded to them. His extensive grounds were full of large effects, masses of color in shaded spots, great grass-plots vividly green in the open sunshine, and luxuriant borderings kept with a nicety of detail that would have astounded a champion of the brick and broken glass era. Personally he was very much like his grounds, large, well-shaven, and clean-looking. The son of a respectable Liverpool merchant, he

had become, at a very early age, a commercial agent of his father's house, extending more particularly its American interests. In one of his trips across the Atlantic, he formed the acquaintance of a young girl, an orphan, who was being sent abroad to complete her education at a celebrated convent near Paris. A profound impression was made upon him by her gentle beauty. Her tall, slight figure, slender face, brunette complexion, and sad brown eyes, provoked an interest which was supplemented by the knowledge of a fact as powerful in its influence upon an Englishman's heart as personal beauty. She possessed a fortune large enough to warrant his most assiduous efforts to obtain her favor, notwithstanding the fact that it was invested in a manner distasteful to the average sentiments of his class, in plantations and negroes. So persistent were his attentions, and so unexceptionable his address, that at the completion of her studies he secured the gentle, beautiful girl for his wife, and settled down in England to enjoy his American possessions.

The delicate beauty which had charmed him did not ripen into the florid vigor of his

matronly countrywomen. The frail physique, burdened with an insidious lung trouble, gradually succumbed to its advances, and faded away forever in the second year of marriage.

There was left to the young Englishman a little daughter to whom he devoted himself. The mother had overruled the husband in naming the child. Local attachment was more intense with her than any other sentiment, and she cherished the memory of her former home, beautified by every pleasant impression which early associations can fix in the mind with passionate tenderness.

It was a veritable homesickness which made the beautiful Indian name of her native State the most fascinating of sounds. How many things it recalled to her!—the far-away fields, the white plantation house gleaming amid the trees, a little girl bending over the balustrade of the long galleries, watching the frolicsome antics of ragged ebony-faced children just escaped from the quarters, the cotton-picking, the negro Christmas—all her childish life picturing itself in never-to-be-forgotten scenes.

A strange name to give a child, but it pleased her fancy; and it so happened that

instead of the stately Saxon Edith, favored by the father, the mother's loving persistence gained for the infant daughter a name which embodied her faithful retrospect.

She called her Alabama.

Afterwards a pet diminutive came to supersede it, and those who loved the child best called her Bamma.

It would have required a broad stretch of the imagination to have connected the idea of constancy to a wife's memory with Alfred Muir's cheerful type. One would have said that he was the man of all others to have fitted himself snugly into a new affection. That he did not, proved that one might have been mistaken. He enjoyed thoroughly the social side of life, but whenever his friends rallied him upon the prospect of a second marriage he dismissed the question lightly—"I have had my share of happiness," and he devoted himself to the child.

Some one has said that an Englishman can never travel without his wife and his umbrella. In Mr. Muir's case one might have put in place of wife his little daughter. She went with him everywhere, and made it home for

him wherever he went. Inheriting the mother's grace and delicacy, she possessed an inexhaustible gayety of heart that was a fountain of delight to the father. He spared nothing to make her happy.

There were many journeyings to and fro upon the Continent before he brought her home at last to her mother's country, journeyings in which she seemed to have garnered nothing more ponderous than golden sunshine and a bit of song.

The atmosphere of the joyous Southern city suited her. A native could have entered no more vehement protest than she against the good-natured sneer with which in the carnival days the practical Englishman, her father, suggested that men might find better employment than in making monkeys of themselves.

The far-sighted business man saw the shadow of a day of reckoning in the folly of the moment, the young girl only danced and sung. Nevertheless the day of payment came swiftly and in a most unexpected manner to her.

One bright spring morning when the hours had advanced to a period of special interest for her, she opened the broad venetian win-

dow which invited the south wind, and raised her face to catch a breath of it. She uttered a soft sigh of content as it stirred her hair and fluttered the lace at her throat.

A slight shiver passed through her, and she stretched her hands upward to meet the sunshine which found its way through a lattice of leaves formed by the branches of the oak near by, that shaded half the window.

The sunshine touched the outstretched palms, crept up the rounded arms, and then glorified her face. It brightened her very dark hair and glittered upon the small white teeth shining behind the parted crimson lips.

The cheeks usually too pale took on a tinge of color that gave depth and lustre to the eyes, and the few brown freckles that came out distinctly in the bright light served to enhance the beauty of the cream-white complexion.

Material beauty breathed through every line of the face and the lithesome figure.

Something pleased her. She swayed to and fro, as if in response to some unuttered musical rhythm. Now and then a slight blush suffused her cheek, and her hand went instinctively to her heart, as if to stay the warm color there.



Again covering her eyes with both little palms, she laughed softly, and swayed again to the melody she alone could hear.

Just here by this very window he had taken her hand, and—yes—had kissed her! The spot where his soft mustache had touched her cheek glowed vividly. No one had ever dared to kiss her; but—and the quick blush came again—she had given some one the right to dare it. Oh, supreme confession! She fled from the magnitude of it.

Catching up her garden-hat, she went out among the flowers, as if they could deliver her from the weight of it.

The world outside was brilliant; the little bunches of violets growing by the steps sent up a delightful fragrance as her skirts brushed them. She stooped to gather two or three, and farther on she added to them a rose-bud.

There was method in the arrangement. One might have seen the ultimate design shaping itself in the conscious smile about the full, rosy mouth.

A sound startled her.

Swift as the movement of a bird, one little hand disappeared, and nestling at the back



upon her slender waist, defied a chance betrayal of the floral treasures. Their time was not yet come. The footsteps and figures upon the banquet were unresponsive and unfamiliar.

She laughed softly, very softly, two or three little silvery trills, with a slight catch of the breath at the last. Then she became full of artifice.

She turned her head, elevated her pretty face, and looked far away through the branches of the live-oak into the blue sky beyond, while her hand dropped slowly down from its perch and hung by her side, quite still for a moment. She raised it stealthily, until the flowers touched her lips, and caught a light kiss upon their cool and fragrant leaves.

Was ever fresh young life more fair and sweet?

John Morant coming at this moment and standing beside her, must have answered some such mental question—one could have guessed how satisfactorily to himself by the glow upon his face, and the look of pride and fervid admiration in his eyes. He was moved to the depths of his appreciative nature by her innocent loveliness.

Little wonder that he gazed at her exultingly in the light of so fair a day. Man's love is conquered, won, and thrives best in the atmosphere of physical beauty, and she was his own.

In the great oak a red-bird sent out a shrill triumphant note.

It was the essential harmony of a moment which expanded John's soul with the godlike conceit of his ability to command his fate, his own pre-eminence seeming to be the one manageable fact of his existence.

"For me?" he said, confidently touching the suggestive flowers.

She shook her head and carelessly pinned them in the lace at her throat. It was a very indirect way of approaching an intention. Possibly she resented a certain air of proprietorship which might lessen her power to sway him. If so, her small coquetry re-established her feeling of security, for a shade of disappointment passed over his face. By so slight a caprice may profound emotion be dominated in a time which seldom repeats itself in a man's life.

"You expected me. I thought, then, they were gathered for me."

"And if they were not?"

"Then their value lies in the intention which holds them. To prompt it would be to depreciate them."

"Are you quite certain you will never ask them of me?"

"Quite certain."

He had regained his look of confidence, while she nestled her chin close against the flowers, as if they might betray a secret.

"But you will be kind to me," he added, "if I tell you I am come to ask a greater favor?"

Among the pleasant thoughts which filled his mind, was one whose origin was in a certain discussion of his happiness, which had urged his consideration of all the articles of family pride.

How thoroughly he had considered them he desired to prove to the two who rested their faith on him. Their retired life had given them no opportunity of meeting this beautiful girl, and it was his urgent wish to present her to them, his promised wife, as fair a woman, he exultingly believed, as any Morant had ever brought to his home. As much of the circumstances surrounding them as

needed explanation he told to Bamma, and then he asked if she would go with him to see them.

“ You know the custom of the old French district demands a first visit from the stranger. And,” he continued, responding to a look in her eyes which for a moment suggested deliberation, “ it will only be a new field of conquest. They can but love you as I do.”

She blushed rosy red at this assurance. Flattery was no new thing in her life, but it was very fresh and sweet in this new relation. If the contemplated visit possessed a debatable point, it was lost in the subjection of her will to a guiding power stronger than any that had ever influenced it. She consented.

Slight a concession as this was, it caused John to feel a sudden elation, an added sense of security in the supreme results. His pulse beat high with pride and joy. The vision of Bamma by his father's side, lighting with her joyous presence the shadows of the old house, illumined his eyes. Was it instinct that made her shrink from their brightness? Could she ever comprehend the high-strung romantic side of his nature, which evoked the images of

all the noble women who had borne the family name and honor, that he might place her beside them and glory in his choice?

"Oh!" exclaimed she, hastily, with a downward sweep of the curling lashes which shielded her eyes from his ardent gaze, "I am not sure. Your judgment is prejudiced. They may be able to form an opinion of me less favorable than yours."

"Take courage," he responded, with the quick instinct of his gallant French blood, "if I acknowledge that they may; for it would only imply the superlativeness of my own."

The color rose in her face, and her eyes sparkled at his words. What woman's heart ever failed to grow warm at honeyed speech!

"Name a day, then, and compel me to the engagement, or I may be tempted, after all, to run away from it."

"To-morrow?"

"When you please."

"To-morrow, then, it shall be. But how shall I bind you to your word if you grow timid?"

"I will give you a pledge." She took the flowers from where they had nestled against her delicate throat and offered them.

"So I must take them, after all, with conditions. Well, I have need of lessons of patience, and you shall teach me."

"No," she responded, with a light laugh; "take them unreservedly. I can never have you think of me as a teacher."

Contemplating her from a stand-point beyond the sympathetic influences of youth and beauty, one would have echoed her words, "Never a teacher," and still thoughtfully regarding her, it might have been said that but for an indefinable lack of spirituality in a loveliness which glowed in the morning sunshine with all the vigor and color of the flesh, one would have called her an inspiration. Truly a notable woman! with her full rounded shoulders and beautiful bust, her large eyes gushing with tender light, her straight and delicate nose, her exquisite teeth, and that singularly subtle, sensuous charm about the lower half of the face, for which disappointed men have been known to kill others or themselves.

John held her flowers, the fragrant essence of her thoughts of him, and his eyes distinctly implored her to pin them in his coat; but she



glanced reproachfully at the passers-by who looked in, all unconscious of the little drama before their eyes.

"It is nothing," he said; "you will not care."

Bending forward, her fingers fluttered for an instant near his heart, and repenting of all coquetry, she gave him a glance of such wonder-working power that a blessed calm seemed to settle upon the whole world. Button-hole bouquets and every other fact but that she loved him were forgot. Foolish drama! foolish words! Reproduced for each new-comer to the fairy land pre-empted by youth. The spirit moved them and they spoke, and the shallowness of words no more disturbed them than the rustle of the south wind. The curtain might ring down upon their happiness, while the sweet applause of hidden voices sounded upon the ear and re-echoed along the secret chambers of the heart.

When she had dismissed him with a nod and a smile which were fitting accompaniments to his thoughts, he stood still an instant looking tenderly at the little bouquet upon his breast; then touching it gently he

laid back the lapel of his coat, and took from the inner pocket the next best comfort that he carried near his heart.

Lighting his cigar as he moved away, he watched the smoke float upward, break into rings, and spread away into illimitable space, carrying with it a host of pleasant dreams which rose just as lightly far above material things. Yet material things were the dominant tones of his dreams.

In after-years, if there came to him a breath of spring morn, the odor of violets, the note of a bird, there came back to him the full melody of that time. Memory instantly reproduced that scene. The touch of one single note of that sweet harmony of light, fragrance, and sound brought back the vision—

“Striking th’ electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.”

## CHAPTER VII.

IN the drive through that portion of the city which Bamma had never visited, the perfect fitness of day and hour impressed itself pleasantly upon John Morant. The dancing waves of the crystalline atmosphere conveyed a sensation to sight as well as touch. There was not a silvery drift across the blue sky to cast a shadow. Nature was respondent to gladsome thought and feeling.

As he contemplated the pretty figure beside him, an analysis of his emotions would have disclosed his complete subjection to the spell cast upon him by the glance of an eye, a soft, sweet smile, and the gracious droop of a pretty head. Precedents as innumerable as the human race itself would have established the invariableness of the condition under given circumstances; but to John it seemed that the world had returned to pristine beauty, and he alone admitted to a knowledge of it.

Fair to look upon and full of unspeakable

grace was Bamma, as, with her parasol held lightly above her head, she leaned forward, swaying from her slender waist with willowy ease, noticing everything, enjoying everything, animating the world around her with her fresh young life.

Exclamations of interest momentarily escaped her. The swift passage from the newness and freshness of progress and improvement into regions which represented an energy long since expended, would have conveyed but one meaning, that of novelty, to an unimpressible observer; but to Bamma the labyrinth of dismal streets occasionally appealed to a sense of acquaintanceship—the tall houses with drearily closed shutters and overhanging balconies, long since unsafe to tread of human feet; the little ones resting against each other as if for support, extending modestly upon the banquet two or three worn steps, waiting wearily for feet that never seemed to come: row after row repeating themselves in a likeness which grew upon her as they advanced.

“So much for travel,” said John, answering her suggestion of its familiarity. “You have been robbed of the possibility of a new im-

pression. It is the type you recognize. Here are transplanted France and Spain, and you know immediately the inspiration of earthen tiled roofs, plastered walls, small, closed windows, and half ruinous habitations. But," he continued, with mock solemnity, "I must not forget to make due allowance for the spirits which haunt this old section, ready to take possession of every romantic invader of it, and I must warn you that they are proverbially untruthful. If you breathe this atmosphere long, you will begin to people these houses with creatures of your imagination who will bear not a shadow of moral or mental likeness to those who have tenanted or do tenant them, but you will be able to fit them into every available space, and make them play their parts as naturally as the original inhabitant."

"You would like me to believe," said Bamma, "that it is a medium for a sort of spiritual séance."

"That is just what the coming novelist will find it; and if he wields a facile pen he will so thoroughly materialize his phantoms that they will be accepted as historical." Turning a corner, a sudden shadow fell upon them. The

carriage had rolled into a street so narrow that high brick walls on either side shut out the sunshine. Bamma closed her parasol and leaned back with a shade of uneasiness upon her face.

Her sensitiveness to external impressions had increased to that degree that she felt a shuddering awe of the deserted houses about her.

One house especially obtruded itself upon her with a peculiarly insinuating personality long before they neared it, a dark, square, many-shuttered house, with a large arched gate-way at the side, barred and padlocked so long ago that the years were wearied of eating into the heart of the great iron bolts, and avenged themselves in the rotting panels through which one caught glimpses of the walled-in yard beyond, glimpses which disclosed a growth of waving grasses, tangled vines, and such wild vegetation as in that generous soil expends itself luxuriantly upon places forgotten of men.

John followed the direction of Bamma's eyes in their fixed attention, and asked,

"What is it that interests you so deeply?"

"A dreadful old place," she answered, with



a shiver, and then instinctively drew nearer to John as they rolled by it.

It was weird-looking enough in the sombre light. Time had clothed it with singular sadness. There was nothing of to-day in its hapless aspect. The filmy seals which the industrious spider had placed upon shutters and door-way were old and dusty; the years had branded it as an outcast, and man had abandoned it.

To John, whose perceptive faculties were blunted by familiarity with its grim outlines, there was nothing in its appearance to stir one to shuddering repugnance; but upon Bamma it produced an impression wholly inexplicable, as if the sight of it had suddenly annihilated all warmth and color.

"You would never guess the history of it," said John. "There was a time when it wielded a momentous power in shaping the destinies of some of God's creatures. It was an old slave-yard. Fancy the long dark processions that have filed in and out of that wretched gate-way, while the prophets of the day looked on and saw only the visions of mighty empire."

"It is haunted," said Bamma, in a depressed tone. "Do not tell me anything more of it."

"That you should believe a thing so absurd!" responded John, now thoroughly aroused to the reality of her dread. "Suppose I translate your fear into the vernacular of fetichism, and say, 'The place is voudoued.' Are you superstitious enough to endure that way of putting it?"

"Make it appear as ridiculous as you choose," said Bamma, somewhat nettled at his tone. "I cannot deny that I am superstitious. I have usually listened to hints of the supernatural with little chills creeping over me, yet they possess a fascination for me that I can never withstand. A treacherous sort of pleasure it has proved itself, leaving me sometimes afraid of a shadow. Oh!" she continued, shrinking closer to his side, "if I could only tell you how often and completely my nerves have failed me."

"A natural conclusion to the indulgence in superstitious fancies," said John, smiling in a way which denoted his superior freedom from them. "Unknown spiritual quantities

always resolve themselves into a problem of the nerves."

Bamma declared that he was not half as brave and unbelieving as he assumed to be. His self-complacent armor did not deceive her. There was a vulnerable spot, she was sure, and she would some day see him succumb to the shock of a ghostly visitation. This vehement little speech she delivered in a voice fast recovering from timorousness; but there was just that shade of almost imperceptible coquetry in her manner which made John feel the admiration with which she really regarded his anchorage upon firmer ground.

He was well satisfied to receive her prediction, with no other opposition than a slight uplifting of his shoulder, the faintest approach upon his part to the creole method of a possible admission. Some humorous association in his mind followed the shrug, and that he pursued it one might conjecture from the sudden interest with which he glanced about him.

The mental association evidently included a near object. Premonitory images of that which he expected issued from the adjacent

walls—vague resemblances in broken plaster and unwashed windows which vanished on closer inspection.

At last encroaching slowly upon his line of vision came the little taxidermist's shop. He remembered it as the chance occasion of an amusing half-hour, and in pointing it out to Bamma he recalled with much spirit the impressions of his initial exploration of it. So picturesquely did he sketch its peculiar features, its inmates, and their singular pets, that she was immediately seized with the desire to give it more than passing attention.

"May we not stop a moment?" she inquired, eagerly scanning the wretched exterior.

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied, at once checking their course.

She was in no way intimidated by the disclosures he was prompted to make of the disagreeable features of the little proprietor's workroom, and sprang lightly to the banquet when they stopped in front of it.

Surely the small shop had never admitted finer customers in a finer way. The sun rose high over the tall houses at the very moment

of their entrance. With the current of air that rushed in at the opening door, was sent a luminous stream which caused the tiger to shift his nose restlessly and fold his great velvety paws protectingly over his eyes. The dust whirled from every projection, and rising from the floor, floated down and up and through the intrusive beams—animated fragments, glittering or gray, just as they touched or receded from the golden light. The shabby specimens on the shelves lingered in the shadows, while the mouldy odors floated back towards the dim corners from which they emanated.

The little owner came forward with quick recognition.

“Ah!” said he, bowing profoundly, “it is mo’su’ and,” with an interrogatory inflection, “madame?”

Bamma blushed rosily, while John smilingly said,

“Mademoiselle has heard me speak of your curiosities, and I hope you will be so good as to allow her to see them.”

“I shall be much pleas’,” he responded, with another profound bow, as an expression of

apology to mademoiselle, "but it is not much I haf now, an' everything is dull without Marie. She is gone."

"Gone?" repeated John, inquiringly, afraid to risk further question because of the lugubrious tone with which the assertion was made.

"Yes," said the little man; "but she will come again, mebbe, soon. 'Tis troo," he continued, turning his head on one side with a pensive contemplation of the fact to be announced, "we got no lill' one howselv', but there is one godchil'; fo' troo, we got two godchil', an' we get all the tim' some troub' an' hexpense. Well," with a long-drawn sigh, "it is all rhight. 'Tis to one fun'rhal she go to-da'. Som' da' the fun'rhal will be fo' me, som' da' fo' Marie, an' we will wan' som'boddie fo' ride in the carrhidge."

The solemnity of this idea did not long oppress him. His volubility, like that of all his creole compatriots, necessarily forced him into precipitate changes of thought and topic, and an unexpectedly lively exclamation, followed by a low, short laugh, contained not an atom of disrespect towards the casual exigency which his quick imagination had just intro-



duced. Both exclamation and laugh were called forth by a sudden contemplation of his savage pet, which, as it rested with the sunshine on its thick, fine, shining hair, deepening the transverse shadows and reflecting the tawny yellow and white lights upon its throat, was a thing of beauty to move the little man's good-humored admiration.

"Yes," said he, nodding emphatically towards the animal, "he loog nize, don't he? But som' da' he mus' go too."

Then, as he approached and gently roused it, Bamma admired the cat-like grace with which the young tiger lazily rose to its feet; but she shrank from the glaring eyes and sardonic grin with which it regarded her. She could only wonder at Marie's infatuation, upon which the little man descanted largely, and feel immensely relieved at the movement towards the garden, where the flowers bloomed fresher than ever in their stiff, green boxes, and the white bird peered curiously down at them from the myrtle-tree.

The small court-yard fascinated her. She scarcely listened to the voice of the little man, who with unflagging humor gave himself up

to the pleasant task of repeating his little stories, the details of his narrow life.

What spirit of refinement and beauty had prompted this garden-spot, and endured here through all the years that it had taken to grow the splendid shrubs, now advancing almost to the rank luxuriance of climes still farther south, and the rough knotted vines which spread themselves in verdant masses over unsightly walls.

How old must be the great agave! And there, throwing a long lace-like shadow just beyond it—what was that? Her eyes wandered around the enclosure, but were at fault. Raising them higher, still higher than the walls which surrounded her, she saw, waving its sharp thin foliage gently in the air, the graceful crown of a palm-tree. Was it far away? She could not tell. Magic in its mould, impressing itself vividly against the deep blue sky, it might be either a stone's-throw off, or immeasurably distant in the tropical vistas it suggested, growing under man's kindly care, or at the will of heathen nature untrammelled by human law.

As at the waving of a magician's wand, it

evoked vague fancies. It touched her like a recollection of her childhood. Dim and shadowy, vanishing and returning, the quickened remains of some anterior impression led her into strange confusion.

Her uplifted eyes saw more than a feathery shape and illimitable space. But that vast plain rising from the deep blue ocean might be, after all, only a cloud floating up to the level of her vision, as quick to dissolve and recede from the light as the mutilated memories stirred from their hiding-places in the dimmest corners of her mind. Be the optical deception what it might, there was no disputing its mysterious fascination. The enchanting atmosphere favored illusions, and the complexion of her mind inclined her to indulge them. Essaying to trace the tessellated shadows below, she had reached a region of more fantastic shadows above.

The little taxidermist seemed very far away just then, though she still heard his accents quaintly rising and falling in the progress of his efforts to please and interest. It was to John he was addressing himself, though an occasional sentence reached her.

“One da’ I say to Marie, ‘If his fe’ther is w’ite—’” Then more distinctly she heard a plaintive expression of concern almost comic in its emphasis, and more clearly still John’s bantering inquiry,

“And you would not part with your bird at any price?”

“Non, mo’su’, not while he lives, fo’ no monaie.”

“But some day, after he is dead,” persisted John.

“Ah,” said the little man, roused at last to the spirit of his trade, “mebbe yes, when we stuff him.”

“Bamma,” said John, and Bamma now came out of her dreams with a smile, “remember, we are to have this wonderful bird some day. He has promised, and we must not let him forget.”

“Non, non, mo’su’ mebbe shu’ I will nevva fo’get.”

And a few moments later, when he bowed them out of his shop, the little man repeated, “I will nevva fo’get; I will rhemember it,” adding, with a beaming smile and profounder bow, “lige I will alway rhemember mademoiselle.”

Bamma smiled still more graciously upon the little taxidermist as a reward for the amusing courtliness of his last speech, while, as they turned away, John declared him to be a true creole—a veritable type of the race to whom gallant speech was native, and incident to no special state or condition.

As for the little man, he remained long in his door-way gazing after the gracious made-moiselle, his elbow resting against the defaced lettering upon the frame, and his hand shading his keen bright eyes. After a while he ran his fingers slowly through his hair, pulling it upward straight from his head, as if to relieve even that pressure upon his burdened brain, then he suddenly folded his arms, smiled, and bowed once—twice—three times, in the direction which was now vacant of any moving object. He seemed suddenly to have recognized a type.

To those departing, the small shop quickly became a forgotten incident. In the dull streets a slight current of activity began to be noticeable. Those whom they most frequently met were young girls in white, with blue ribbons and pendent silvery medals, and

women in black, whose features were set in the calmness of that devotional spirit which marks a conscience given to the keeping of a superior power. The point towards which all were tending was a small gray church, with one solitary circular window over the door-way, like a great eye looking down with watchful intent upon the coming of the faithful. Passing that, silence and dulness again fell upon the streets.

"Come," said John, gayly, as once again he checked their progress, and Bamma recognized all at once the importance of the one little word of entreaty and encouragement.

The ancestral establishment was indeed before them. Tall and forbidding, inhospitable in every line of the closed shutters which an upward glance surveyed, its once aristocratic face was turned upon the outsider with a haughty protest against intrusion. "Pass on," it seemed to say to every challenging glance, and Bamma, influenced by its air of disapprobation, would willingly have turned away from it. A wild desire seized upon her to fly at once from its mysterious hostility. In the instant of conflict with this impulse,



when she involuntarily sought to satisfy herself of the possibilities of indulging it, she was again confronted, in every surrounding object, with a confusing, tantalizing suggestion of some former association. It was strange how steadfastly the tiled-roof cottage held her attention. If it had only been to enter there— But again John's voice entreated "Come!" and half sighing she consented.

Her smaller hand lay lost for a moment in the one he extended; then descending from the carriage they entered the house.

The old door groaned more dismally than usual as Celine opened it, and as she stood aside, stately and solemn, to allow them to pass, her face was less impassive than usual. It expressed something of the curiosity which she might be supposed to feel at this departure from the ordinary routine in the quiet household.

Bamma glanced with undeniable interest at the old negress. Unconscious of demanding leave of her own will, she turned again to look upon the dark face, and something riveted her gaze. Her heart gave a great bound, and there sounded in her ears the dull stroke

of its excited action. Everything was lost to her vision but a pair of glowing black eyes wide open and staring, full of a mysterious terror which held her for an instant spellbound.

With one deep inspiration she freed herself and turned towards John. Reassured by his unconsciousness of her emotion, she looked again at Celine, and saw only the respectful bend of the old woman's turbaned head.

Certainly her imagination was oddly active, and her nerves responded in long lingering vibrations. Her condition was irrational. A consciousness stirred within her which was in strange communion with objects about her. The evidences of the past which she had seen for the first time, accommodated themselves to the confusing memories which persistently haunted her. She was overpowered. For a moment she leaned heavily upon John.

"Courage," he whispered, mistaking her emotion, and thinking of the little speech she had once made him. "It is too late to run away. See! the father's spectacles have been brightened for the occasion. They are already regarding us."

And it did seem, when the good old major

greeted her, as if they beamed down upon her with an additional sparkle. His nod of satisfaction sent forth such a prismatic gleam that one could not mistake the extent of his approbation.

Miss Isabel watched with more critical eyes the fair face softened by a shade of timidity as it lifted itself to her welcome. Its beauty evidently penetrated her reserve, for a glitter of tears on Miss Isabel's lashes proclaimed the fact.

Ah, what a golden day that was! It is impossible to say how long its freshness and glory remained with John; and Bamma, conscious of its subtile charm, became an enchanting maiden so joyous and simply happy that she seemed the perfection of Nature's mood.

"A very nice young woman, indeed!" asserted the major, when he found himself once more alone with his daughter. "And my son tells me the father is an Englishman of most excellent family, and a man of wealth too."

"And the mother?" prompted Miss Isabel.

"And the mother," continued the major, "was a very nice person also, who left her daughter a fine inheritance."

## CHAPTER VIII.

ONE's life sometimes reaches a period when the inevitable struggle against human will slackens or is intermitted, and opposition to forward movement ceases; when one's pathway seems to be rolled and smoothed by giant forces, and the world resolves itself into such an easy problem that it is almost impossible to resist the belief in one's own peculiar fitness for its finest results.

The years roll on, and the retrospective eye turning towards such a period sees the pleasant pathway leading up no surmountable acclivity, but marks clearly and distinctly a downward grade from which comes an echo of straying footsteps. It holds a poignant sorrow, and the heart throbs painfully under the weight of that subjunctive form of self-reproach which is the heaviest of all to bear. *If* one had not been blind! *If* one could only have known!

The period which John Morant had just

touched might never be the centre of a sad retrospect, but it possessed all the elements of smoothness and facility which accommodate themselves readily to the lurking humor of fate.

The objective point of his happiness—his wedding-day—was fixed, and he was no longer troubled by a lover's doubts and fears. Congratulated upon all sides, he might well have been pardoned a trace of arrogance.

Exceptionally pleasant was the fact that his vast heaven was unclouded by a suspicion that an uninterrupted sequence of happiness might include some very selfish motives. A wealthy marriage possessed undeniable advantages; but John's heart recorded impressions beyond their influence.

Major Morant, with the fine instinct of one who had enjoyed the benefits of capital, recognized more clearly the importance of such favorable circumstances.

"You will have the opportunity," he said, on one occasion, "and I would urge you, my son, to take advantage of it, to quit a commercial life. Go back to the ways of the old Morants. The old plantation is waiting for you.

What comparison can be drawn between a merchant's and a planter's life, which is not favorable to the latter? The one full of subserviency, of waiting upon men's leisure, bending to men's whims, of trembling at the shadow of richer men who can corner one's lesser earnings, and the other full of freedom and independence. Perfect safety and security in trade are unknown to the average toiler, but the one grateful thing in nature is the fruitful soil. The man who depends upon it can count upon peace of mind as well as dollars and cents."

"All very fine in the abstract, father," replied John; "but times have changed since you were young. The merchant is master of the situation now. Even Nature seems less generous than she was in the good old times, and the planter finds himself almost wholly dependent upon the man at the desk."

"A very good arrangement," said the major; "one's comfort must be greatly enhanced by the knowledge of a middle man upon whom one may cast all cares and bad debts. But even under changed conditions," continued the major, returning to his proposition, "I



think success lies in the old place. Life would be worth something to see its fields green once more." And he grew triumphant when his son came to regard in a favorable light the thought of a regeneration of interests which represented the glory of olden days.

"I have always said the place would be of value again, and I will live to see it."

"We must not underestimate the chances against us," said John, with a knowledge of the accidents and failures recorded in the pages which he daily turned.

"No," said the major, elated by the revival of an almost extinguished hope. "It will be an experiment, but if you succeed—"

There could have been no vision finer than the one which then filled the major's eye. A vast plain blossoming, ripening, whitening under the fervid rays of a midsummer sun, and here and there, bending to the toil of the day, moving lines of laborers whose dark faces, with changing aspect, showed occasionally above the broad, level, smooth roadways leading up to the great gin-house, over which rolled and swelled with the light breeze a fleecy cloud of escaping steam, and brown

lines of fencing lost in the dim woods touching the horizon. Ah! if it could all come back. One might accept willingly any modified conditions if prosperity would only come to the desolated lands again!

This discussion of John's possible future took place one evening upon the gallery where Miss Isabel loved to sit. While it engaged the attention of the little group to whom it was most momentous, the old negress sat out under the fig-tree strangely silent. The low humming tune with which she usually solaced her hours of rest was hushed. She sat motionless, watching with patient vigilance every movement of the speakers.

By-and-by she grew restless and glided like a dark shadow through the grounds, her eyes always turned uneasily towards the point from which the voices came. Her restlessness increased as time passed on.

It was not until John rose to go that the opportunity for which she seemed to have waited presented itself. She hurried to the door, and stood anxiously but respectfully ready to open it for him.

• The suppressed excitement of her manner

impressed him. He turned to speak to her. In the greed of happiness he desired even her good wishes.

"Are you going to wish me much joy, Celine?"

"Ah, Mars' John," she said, with a mournful shake of the head, "how can I?"

"Why, what is the matter?" he said, slightly amused at her dejection.

"'En't I nuss yo' sence yo' was teenty baby, an' don' yo' believe I wan' efry tin' good for yo'. 'Tain't comin' dat way, Mars' John. Will yo' lis'en to me? Dar's sumpin' wrong. I kin tell yo', but yo' won' believe." Her voice grew husky and she broke down utterly as he recoiled from her. There was anxiety and even fright, yet persistent purpose in her set face.

"Out with it," he said, roughly, making an impetuous movement towards her.

"Yes, Mars' John," she replied, more firmly, "I must say it. Sumpin' here"—striking her heart with her closed hand—"tells me I'se got to do it. I 'members far back. Sum' folks kin never fo'git if dey libs to de Jedge-ment-day, an' I'se one dat can't fo'git. It

don' need no sperrit to come back from de dead to tell me nothin'. I looks into sum' eyes an' I sees straight back, Lord! how far back!" She drew her breath heavily, and then continued, "Back to de fount'in head whar' de stream is clear an' whar' it's muddy; don' go dat way, Mars' John! It's mizry."

"Is the woman crazy?" said John, as he gazed at her in blank amazement.

Glancing behind her as if she feared space itself, Celine advanced a step or two and lowered her voice to a terror-stricken whisper.

"It's de eyes. Dey can't deceive yo', Mars' John. Lemme tell yo' all I sees. She is jus' lige her cousans."

"What cousins?" said John.

"Dem what leef oppozeet long time 'go."

"Speak out and tell me plainly what you mean."

He listened for a moment to her quivering sentences, and then a torrent of indignation leaped from his very soul. How dared she? She had spoken truly when she said that she had nursed him, and tended him, and loved him. Her fidelity was unquestioned and his hand was stayed; but how dared she find

words for a suspicion so unwarranted, and which entered like poison into his brain? The hot blood danced in his veins. He did not wait to look again at the old creature, who retreated into the darkest recess of the hall, paralyzed at the deadly resentment of his first glance.

The open air into which he rushed felt like a breath of heaven, and reason returned to him. A vague terror possessed him even as he resented Celine's words. Had she a foundation for them? Could it be possible there were characteristics patent to her experience which escaped others?

There came suddenly to his memory a story that had once been told him. All its details flashed before him, with the tragic sequel which had always thrilled him with its unutterable pathos. Two brothers had been highly esteemed in the social circles of a neighboring city, which boasted alike of its gallant men and remarkably beautiful women. Educated abroad, introduced as the nephews of an honorable man, no suspicion of their birth had ever been aroused. Coming one winter with a gay party to the old St. Charles Hotel, they

had entered with zest into all the amusements which New Orleans afforded. The first evening that they presented themselves at the French Opera-house, an old employé singled them out of the party just taking possession of a proscenium box, and touching each upon the shoulder, pointed to a gallery set apart for a special race. In the excitement consequent upon his action the employé stood firm.

“It is my business to know. I am never deceived.”

Investigation verified his assertion. John shuddered anew at the horror of it. Suppose he, John Morant, should inadvertently ally himself— His heart stood still. All the blood of his race protested against the thought; but even as it rushed passionately to the denial of the possibility of a fatal circumstance, there rose upon his mental vision a picture as enchanting as ever seduced great Antony. In the inthralment of his senses he could see the droop of a pretty head upon his breast, and feel about his neck the pressure of soft arms. If fate should come like that!

“Bamma,” he murmured, “my Bamma—that any one—” How tight that clasp seemed



about his throat! "That any one could come near you with a breath of—that deepest curse of all! That would be, indeed, a gulf of despair!"

Was it because of the neighborhood that there suddenly went sounding through his brain the refrain of the little taxidermist, "Poor lill bird, he has no mate?"

There just beside him certainly was the small shop. It irritated him to see its shabby window shining in the moonlight with preternatural brightness. His thoughts were shaping themselves in the channel of his desires, and it touched him with a sense of impertinent intrusion. Half vindictively he approached and glanced in upon the dusty relics. The moonlight had exhausted itself upon the exterior, and there was but the faintest radiance inside. The shadowy outlines of birds and reptile were just visible in the dim light, and silhouetted themselves against the walls in absurdly grotesque forms. The little owl spread himself out to enormous size, and the small alligator cast a crocodilian shadow as gigantic as that of some antediluvian progenitor. The duckling developed into a superb

swan, swaying up and down on a white sea, while the coral branches reached out like the tentacles of a great octopus. Strong emotion is an accident in life which Nature sometimes repairs with such insignificant facts that one is tempted to wonder at the facility with which the jarred machinery is balanced and sent moving in a reverse direction. The very exaggeration of the inanimate objects on which John gazed, introduced an element of burlesque into his thoughts. He laughed at their curious distortion and then grew wrathful and contemptuous of himself. They were no more absurd than the vagaries of an old negress's imagination. Why had he tormented himself in listening to her words? A stern rebuke of their fantastic improbability would have been more fitting than all this expenditure of feeling. He could have relied upon the old creature's faithfulness never to so offend again. What so easy, if he ever seriously considered them, as to prove their falsity? Like a man who had thrown off the heavy burden of a nightmare he exulted in his awakening. He fixed his face steadily towards a point where brighter lights were beginning to be visible.

He was coming up out of the world of shadows.

And yet—that night was a restless night, haunted by evil dreams, in which the tiger, full-grown and escaped from his cage, the white blackbird slowly transforming into a woman, Bamma, himself, and a deep, dark, swiftly descending current, bore unintelligible parts—over all these were ancestral voices of warning and threatening, and he started once from his sleep, exclaiming aloud,

“Descending towards the gulf!”

## CHAPTER IX.

It is not to be supposed that the words of old Celine failed to return again and again to John's mind. Though he encouraged a light view of them, and tried to avoid all trains of thought leading to conclusions other than those consonant with his feelings, he could not banish them at will. Like the seeds of every wretched suspicion they sprang up, blossomed, fruited, and died, and sprang up anew to torment him. Eventually the reaction from their first impression was very great. In the sunshine of the following days they once more appeared absurd, and resolved themselves into the phantasm of an irresponsible mind. One fact alone he resented, that he had been compelled to listen to them. A chivalrous desire stirred within him to shield his love from the very shadow of calamitous thought. Insinuations as baseless as the fabric of Celine's imagination had touched others. To become *Sanguinæ clarus* had sometimes involved a

legal decision. The records of years gone by contained many such cases. There were others which had been settled by a higher code upon the field of honor. He knew which code would have suited his temperament. He almost wished that the thoughts which troubled him had shaped themselves from a point and in a manner that he could have boldly challenged their truth and proved the might of his arm and his affection.

There was one thing, however, within his power, and it was as alluring as his vision of triumphant vindication. He could compensate by his increased devotion for the one breath of detraction which could never reach Bamma. In the atmosphere of his love there should exist not even a shadow's shadow.

The days progressed all too slowly towards the period when she would own his supreme protection. His words and actions formulated but one idea and became the medium of but one manifestation, his affection for her.

It was not difficult in the course of events to acquire much knowledge of Mr. Muir's claim to that position in the social world which he had assumed. Little by little it

unfolded itself, through a chance remark, through the unreserve of friendly intercourse, in which the pardonable pride of the well-born, well-bred man, found expression giving clear insight of his antecedents, and always convincingly of the worthiness of his claim. It startled John on one occasion, when Mr. Muir was peculiarly communicative of past events, to hear him say,

“My wife, you know, was an adopted child.” And the subsequent assertion was received with interest: “She was a near relative of her adopted mother.”

In pronouncing the name of the family he gave one noted in the history of a State which had honored it in more than one instance by the highest official position at its disposal. The earth grew firmer under John's feet with every advance. Supported by facts which he carefully gleaned, there appeared not a single defect in the structure upon which he rested his pride and faith.

The slight shock, the loosening of the single stone by the hands of the old negress, passed beyond notice, with the solution given of her singular declaration that age was tell-



ing at last upon her and clouding her faculties.

If one could have only seen the despairing look with which she turned away from reprimand, and with this assertion,

“He was warn’. He won’ believ’.”

Society approved the approaching marriage. A feminine reporter of later date, industrious of pen and lax of reserve, might have found in it elements commending themselves for interesting detail. It was commented upon, generally discussed, and produced an ever-increasing demand of attention from the class which faithfully ranges itself upon the brilliantly conventional side of life.

It even aroused Major Morant’s old friends to a sense of its social importance. To have the quiet comfort of their Sunday talks broken in upon by the major’s interest in events more recent than those of a quarter of a century past, was, to say the least of it, trying. Their combined discontent manifested itself in the reserve with which they listened to him, and the perfect freedom with which they discussed him and his new topic.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Byrne, as the two

were finding their way as usual to the old house down-town, "that every man takes a degree of comfort in seeing his son well married; but there seems to me no reason why he should be aggressively jubilant over it."

"You think he ought to be sobered by a calculation of the chances against happiness in the long-run. It is not to be expected that an old bachelor like you would take any other view of the 'case.'"

"I have no views at all about it," said Mr. Byrne, "I simply resent the intrusion of a matter with the expectation that I will join in any rejoicing over it."

"You are true to your principles, then, and would encourage celibacy by refusing to sympathize with a departure from it."

"Nonsense! I am not against any man's marrying; but if you make a demand upon my sympathies you will find them engaged by the other party to the contract."

"There!" said Mr. Burton, triumphantly, "I knew you had some theory of matrimony, and it develops itself in your taking the woman's side of the question. What will happen next? The chances are that your sympathies will

some day outweigh your discretion and make a married man of you."

Notwithstanding their long, intimate association, Mr. Burton's jests sometimes jarred upon his friend. This time it made him glare almost fiercely into Mr. Burton's mocking face, and the good-fellowship of years might have been marred; but just then the door of the old house before which they had paused, opened more quickly than usual in answer to their summons, and Miss Isabel's pathetic face dawned upon them.

"For the first time in all these years," she explained, "old Celine is unable to attend to her duties, so it falls upon me to be housemaid."

Mr. Burton made a gallant speech, in which he commented upon the very pleasing substitute; but Mr. Byrne said nothing. It was entirely inexplicable that he should flush to the very crown of his venerable bald head. Perhaps it was the result of that sharp, quick indignation against Burton. He could not analyze it, but felt its momentary discomfort, and hastened forward to meet his old friend Morant with more than usual eagerness.

The wedding morning came. There was an early promise of unclouded skies, but later on a pale gray mist crept over the sun. It came up slowly, deepening gradually into that darker tint which made the weatherwise scan the heavens for one little patch of blue to encourage a hope of brightness by-and-by. Now and then a heavier vapory mass was caught in the brisker undercurrent blowing up from the east, and drifted swiftly across the face of the heavens. Impalpable shadows flitted over the gray walls of the church on the great central thoroughfare, and, quick and tremulous as a swallow's wing, half smothered for a moment the light of the Gothic windows. Pretty girls wreathing the chancel with flowers, looked anxious at the ominous obscurity, and smiled when the shadows lifted. The wedding-bell of flowers, deftly hung in the green arch, occasionally swung lightly to and fro in a gust of wind that swept down the aisles. Then, when the pretty girls had finished their pleasant task, and at the door turned from a last lingering look at the artistic result to a view of lowering clouds without, many shrugs and "ahs!" and "ohs!" filled up a measure of regret.

Darker grew the clouds even to the momentous hour which was to usher in the bridal train. The big clock at the Jesuit Fathers not far away sounded the hour clearly and distinctly. There was a rush for good places of observation in the aristocratic church, and many unbidden guests gloried in the finest gallery seats. From that point came the sound of movements somewhat restless, and a murmur of voices very pronounced; but this lack of decorum was counterbalanced by the repose of mien which characterized those in the body of the church. There was a flutter of fans, the nodding of plumed bonnets, and then the grand swell of the organ.

Close by the door stood old Celine, tall, slender, impassive, her turbaned head bent in an attitude of attention, her great circular gold earrings gleaming against her swarthy skin and vibrating with every breath of the form otherwise so still.

The not too well repressed buzz of excitement increased for a moment.

A crowd upon the banquet watched a line of carriages come and depart, until one, more important than all the rest, became an object

of interest. It swept up and stopped. One heard the click of the open door, and then its heavy closing.

“Ah!” The accent of consternation was distinct, as a heavy shower of raindrops fell and dispersed the lookers-on, but not before they had caught glimpses of snow-white draperies and the flash of jewels, and they were satisfied. A pause within the darker vestibule, and then full upon the bride streamed the lights of aisle and chancel.

Old Celine bent forward eagerly. There stole over her face a sudden, strange look of awe; for upon the veil which fell in soft folds to the hem of the bridal robe, were two or three great drops like shining tears.

“De good Marster knows,” whispered she, and once more her dark face resumed its calm immobility.

A crescendo of the grand wedding-march preceded the solemn hush when the minister uplifted his voice. No response came to the grand charge which rolled sonorously from his lips; but far back against the wall the old negress stood with folded arms, and shook her head slowly from right to left and from



left to right, until the great earrings trembled and shone like circles of fire.

Late into the night the garden district echoed to the roll of carriages. Inside one brilliantly illumined house the murmur of congratulations rose, mingled with an undercurrent of remark, sometimes clear and unreserved, sometimes whispered low, and made more impressive by the pantomimic movement of shoulder and brow.

Never had society made a finer display, except, perhaps, in the memory of the gracious creole matron, who recalled assemblages unsurpassed in the spirit of gallantry and unique in deportment. Miss Murray, smiling encouragingly into the face of her junior escort, left an impression of youthfulness which made one doubt the accuracy of statements which particularized the number of seasons which had passed over her blond beauty. Within an open door-way posed the tall, impecunious young gentleman who had been heard to declare that society cost him nothing beyond the new collar in which he invariably appeared out of compliment to those who invited him to dinner, concert, or ball. The fatality which

had always attended his efforts to establish himself matrimonially, seemed greater by way of contrast to the wonderful success of one whom he regarded as no more meritorious than himself. His unlimited assurance enabled him to confront resignedly some half a dozen reminders of his failures, but another's success caused him a pang.

One would not be likely to overlook among all the guests John Morant's warmest friend, Dr. Ed. Dickson. His handsome face and polished manners induced many to forget the erratic ideas with which he was beginning to be credited; though it was hard for acknowledged beauties to forgive the persistency with which he made himself agreeable to a gentle girl who looked out from a shadowy corner of the beautiful rooms with glances which betrayed an experience less varied and extensive than Miss Murray's.

In a snug recess a group of three elderly gentlemen seemed to have become oblivious of the gayety on every side, and, incidental to this, one heard the kindly tones of Major Morant, the mocking laugh of Mr. Burton, and the vehement assertion of Mr. Byrne.

“The world will not go all wrong because a few enthusiasts do.”

“Byrne rests his hopes with the feminine element.”

“I do. When it comes to sustaining every honorable tradition of our race, we may rely upon woman. She is the great conservator of man’s wisdom. When he shall have broken down every barrier which the accumulated experience of years has erected to preserve a people from degeneracy, you will find her holding with blind instinct to the mighty restraining influences of the past.”

The young girl in white, passing at that moment, comprehended nothing of the old man’s speech, the echo only of the last sentence reached her; but something in its tone stirred her and brought a sweet smile and dimples into view, which even Miss Murray would have acknowledged were pleasant to see.

## CHAPTER X.

IN the old house down-town, Miss Isabel sat and sighed more deeply than ever. She had desired a brilliant marriage for her brother, but she had not counted upon the weakening of old ties in the strengthening of new ones.

Visits to the beautiful new home up-town brought her no serenity. John's new-found happiness, in which sisterly love and affection had little share, could not be witnessed without a jealous pang. The old name was once more influential, but its glory was circumscribed. In the days gone by, each member of the old family, even to the remotest kinsman, had gained consideration in the light of its prosperity; but the world somehow seemed to have narrowed the limits of family influence since that time. Miss Isabel lost some illusions, and found she had dreamed some romantic dreams of a revival which was never to be realized. Externals had been of secondary consideration while she had been filled

with the importance of her inner life. Her dreams and aspirations had overshadowed the poverty of her surroundings. The momentous event of the wedding disturbed the placidity of her musings. No little maid of sixteen could have conjured up a more brilliant picture of social triumph than did Miss Isabel as she tenderly patted the thin locks about her temples, and smoothed out her unusual flounces preparatory to re-entering the world upon that occasion. She went forth with the elevating consciousness of the finer clay of which she was fashioned, and rejoicing in the very superior quality of it. She returned with a sense of failure in the general purpose of her existence. One fact impressed itself upon her. She had not slipped quietly away from the world, as she had supposed, just for a little while, but it had slipped quietly away from her. She belonged to the past. The fossilizing process had already begun, and she was taking her place in a historic period.

As she mingled with the unaccustomed crowd, her sense of remoteness increased with each new addition to the throng. She shrank visibly from those who offered congratulations

in high-pitched voices that grated on her ear. She looked in vain for the old-time courteous deference of men towards the gentler sex. High-bred, modest demeanor counted as nothing in an assemblage whose vim and energy confused her. Instinct, education, temperament, were all at variance with the universal "go" of this new world. In the utter revolution of thought and manners, the actuating principle appeared to be a determination to grasp the substance of things unmindful of forms.

The very types of beauty which Miss Isabel had once admired had disappeared. The slender, delicate faces, framed by bands of dark, satiny hair, and soft, bright eyes shining over the tips of feathered fans, in the absolute certainty of their modest attractiveness, were no longer to be seen. The observer's eye was arrested by color rather than outline or expression. There were heads crowned by strange golden-colored hair, massed in wonderful fashion to catch every glimmer of light upon the metallic-looking strands, and brilliant-hued complexions that were climatic solecisms.



Nothing was familiar. Nothing? When her eyes were weary and her heart still wearier of the unwontedness of it all, when she had secured a secluded corner towards which she had gravitated from the beginning, some one came and sat down quietly beside her. Miss Isabel had always looked upon Mr. Byrne as a very aged man, separated from her interest by an infinitude of years. She wondered why their number seemed suddenly to have diminished. He was old and wrinkled, and his nervous hands caressed a cheek as leathery as a mummified Egyptian's; but he was nearer her ideal world than the bustling youth about her, and she beamed upon him in a way that sent a warm glow to the old bachelor's heart.

In the circumstances which had hitherto surrounded her, there had never been any reason why Mr. Byrne should have made anything more than a slight effort to greet her kindly. It occurred to him as he saw her sitting apart, the very mildest-looking of wall-flowers, that some small attention was due to the daughter of his old friend, and he advanced grimly to the duty.

Her glance aroused a responsive enthusiasm astonishing to himself. He did a thing which, when he afterwards reflected upon it, filled him with profound amazement. He chatted with Miss Isabel the greater part of the evening, and found it interesting. As for Miss Isabel, she rallied for a while from her deep dejection, under the inspiring realization that the latent power of fascination, of which every woman holds herself possessed, had promptly developed itself, even though in a very curious direction; but still she went home in a very melancholy mood.

The old quiet ways became unendurable, because they were robbed of the dreams which had brightened them. The house was a terrible solitude. In silent dismay Celine watched her mistress wander about like some disturbed spirit. Restlessness grew with the advancing days.

One morning the woman in the green-and-white cottage over the way was astounded to see all the shutters of the old Morant house thrown open, and God's sunshine entering of its own free will. She could see this much, but she could not follow the bright beam be-

yond the window ledges, and see it creeping very softly at first, as if afraid of a chilly welcome, and then more confidently, until it fairly rioted upon the mouldy walls and moth-eaten carpets.

Miss Isabel shuddered a little at its intensity, and then her mild face settled into a perceptibly determined expression, as if she were saying to herself, "It has come in and it shall stay."

The unusual illumination waked Major Morant from a doze in his old arm-chair.

"Bless me, my child!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing? Isn't it very imprudent to open the windows and let in so much air? We will all be sick."

"I think not, papa. Why should we be shut up with mould and damp and mildew? Others let in the sunshine, why not we?"

He looked at her helplessly. "Why, my daughter, we have been very well and happy in the old way, haven't we?"

She hesitated a moment, and then responded cheerily, "Yes, papa, but we are going to improve upon it."

There was no help for it. The major rec-

ognized the development of a new force in his meek daughter, and permitted himself to be led accordingly. She quieted his fears and moved him out of the draughts.

The bright sunshine stirred her as it had never done before. As she paused thoughtfully in its shining pathway it prompted her to an unusual proceeding. She turned suddenly and stole timidly up-stairs, as if the very walls had power to rebuke her. She came down again bonneted and gloved for a walk. Her head-gear was ordinarily unobtrusive, the strings of her small bonnet always tied with dainty care under the very centre of the one dimple in her face which time would always spare her. Something, however, had given an air of self-assertion to a certain butterfly-bow set on the very top of this bonnet, whose forked ends caught the breeze and fluttered out defiantly. One looking at it would have said that its possessor could be very daring if convinced of the necessity of progress.

The object of Miss Isabel's expedition did not seem at first to be specially defined in her own mind, for she paused occasionally as if in doubt. There was a flush of excitement upon

her cheek, and a trembling smile hovered about the tightly compressed lips.

At last she moved on resolutely. Her way was certainly clear before her. She passed street after street, then an untended square, dark, cool, and full of shadowy resting-places under the trees, a broken, rusty, iron fence shutting out the trespassers who never came to disturb its repose.

Beyond the square the streets became narrower and more crooked, one especially, reaching a certain point, curved away to the left for the distance of three or more lots, before it continued on its first course. The central house in the curve was taller than its neighbors, and had the air of leaning with the street as it swept away from it. In fact the house had made such an effort to go with the street that it had quite parted company with the door-step, which still held its ground invitingly firm, notwithstanding the yawning crevice above it. The step was as clean as a scrubbing with yellow ochre could make it, and moist bits here and there attested that the work upon it had been recent.

The new washed walls and general air of

smartness encouraged the belief that the outside world was of more importance to its inmates than to those of less pretentious houses adjoining it. Curtains of white embroidered muslin, with ruffles fluted in most approved style, hung over the half-sash doors, while across the wooden shutter swung back to disclose them was a square of tin painted black. On this, in white letters, Miss Isabel saw a name and an announcement of profession—

CLEMENCE.

COIFFEUSE.

It was what she had been looking for, and now, standing before it, she half repented her coming.

As insignificant as is the sum demanded for a daily attendance, and as necessary as the hair-dresser is to the average creole gentlewoman, never since her far-off youth had Miss Isabel dared to indulge in the services of one; but now with the memory of the marvellous heads which the fashion ruled should impress the beholder, the economic instincts of years



failed to check the rising desire to imitate them.

There was no bell visible, so Miss Isabel tapped gently at the door. It was immediately opened by a genteel-looking woman—one might say a uniformly black woman, for there was no difference of hue, scarcely a difference of shade between her ebony face and the deep mourning garments she wore. Miss Isabel hesitated a moment, but the woman opened the door very wide, and so inviting was the interior that she entered at once.

There was fresh matting on the floor; a rug representing a hunting scene, in which my lady's snow-white steed appeared somewhat aged, but evidently well taken care of; a good broad mirror, with a shelf before it, on which were combs, hair-pins of every length and shape, toilet-waters, and good smelling powders; and in front of that a pleasant chair, protected by an immaculate apron tied behind its back.

"Is this Clemence?" inquired Miss Isabel, in French.

Replying with most excellent accent, the woman declared that mademoiselle had called

her by her proper name, and she would be happy to wait upon her.

"You have been recommended to me as an excellent hair-dresser," said Miss Isabel.

"Does mademoiselle wish to try me this morning?" asked the woman.

Miss Isabel replied in the affirmative, and almost before she could realize it her bonnet with its daring bow was laid aside, and with it went some of her self-assertion. She felt now that she would be as wax in the hands prepared to renew her youth.

"You are just in time, mademoiselle. I go soon to one of my ladies, but I will comb you nicely."

"You are much employed, I suppose?" said Miss Isabel.

"Yes, mademoiselle; I have ladies all over the city, up-town and down-town, who will have no one to comb them but me."

"Do you speak English as well as French?"

"Yes, miss," she answered, dropping at once into that language, and speaking with equally good accent. "My madam gave me good advantages. It is for her that I wear black. She had me taught my trade, and I travelled with

her very much. We were in London and in Paris for a long time."

"You are very expert," said Miss Isabel, admiring the ease and even grace with which she performed her task. The hands which twisted and turned and pinned the dark hair were small and well modelled, though as black as flesh could possibly be.

✂ "Yes, miss; I minded well, and people always get along if they mind what they are about. But I was lucky, too, for my madam was a fine lady. My husband, he came from Virginia, miss, and knows a great deal, if he is black—blacker than I am, if you can believe that. He thinks I know how to work, and he often tells me—he does, indeed, miss—'Clemence, you've had a heap of advantages, and it all comes of belonging to quality people.' To tell you the truth, miss, I never comb for any one else. I know them as soon as I see them." Pausing in the progress of rolling a thin lock into a puff of extraordinary dimensions, the woman continued, with a smile which showed a row of teeth like porcelain,

"Mademoiselle should let me do this for her always. She looks handsome like that,"

and she pointed to a reflection in the mirror where Miss Isabel appeared so like the wonderful women of the new regime that her heart gave a great throb of pleasure and of pain. She could not resist the impression of loss as well as gain. For years she had confided her troubles to the reflection of a meek, demure, gentle face, with well-brushed bandeaux holding rigidly in check the ears which heard nothing of the outside world or of the prodigious freedom in store for her sex, and now it was gone. It was a companion which she had lost.

The gain was something marvellous. The bandeaux had been lifted, two light wings seemed to have been added just over the great organs of causality, and Miss Isabel was inclined to believe that she was prepared for a great flight from all trouble, rather than for any daily conference with it. The woman's flattery, too, gave her a sense of lightness. It was long since she had been told that she was handsome; but it was evident to her own eyes that under Clemence's deft fingers she had grown younger and handsomer. She rose from the chair thoroughly satisfied with herself and Clemence.

She did not at once direct her steps towards home, but following the street as it turned away from the hair-dresser's, walked some distance, stopping at last before a green gate set in high white palings. A small grating just above an old-fashioned knocker enabled her to see into the flower-garden beyond. A network of vines fringed the upper edge of the fence, and ran luxuriantly over the arch of the gate-way. A little bell tinkled as the green gate yielded to her touch, and an odor of fresh cut flowers came floating out with the current of air that passed through the open way.

The flowers were there in all their delicious dewiness. Upon benches either side of a long arbor were baskets full of roses, half hidden in a mass of sheltering foliage. These were flanked by huge tied structures, meaningless in their placid, full-blown rotundity, but helping to fill the air with delicate perfume. There were beds of damp gray moss for violets, and all the small, frail things that exhale a fragrance.

At the end of the arbor sat the presiding genius of all this loveliness—a decrepit old woman, whose feeble hands shook with nerv-



ousness as she sorted the sweet-smelling blossoms. She hailed her coming customer with a nod of satisfaction, and a smile that would have done credit to an arch coquette.

“Make your choice, mademoiselle. They are all fresh and fine.”

Miss Isabel walked softly among the flowers, inhaling with delight this pure, sweet breath of Nature. She found it difficult to make a selection among all the beauties that smiled up at her, and with the shrewd old woman at her side prompting and encouraging every fancy, it was no wonder she left the garden with full hands. The few people she met gazed at her lovely burden, but there were no looks of curiosity to annoy her. Theirs was a religion of flowers, and the bearer of them a supposed votary to some shrine of the Holy Mother. She stopped once on her way home at a place where small varieties were sold. A *rabais* shop, the people around would have called it.

“It is mademoiselle’s fête n’est-ce-pas?” said the dark-eyed, slender shop-girl, as she neatly wrapped the purchase and cast admiring glances at the flowers.



"No," responded Miss Isabel, with some asperity, as she hurried away. Fête days had not been remembered with her for many a season. Her heart smote her for being cross at such a trifle, but how could she help being sensitive to a suggestion which is never pleasant to any woman whose years have begun to be numbered by decades, with additional numerals.

The day was in its fullest splendor when she reached home, and fatigue overpowered her. It was not until some hours later that she rose to the fulfilment of the purpose which had fixed itself in her mind.

She decorated the parlors. Flowers here, flowers there, flowers everywhere. When her work was completed, it was droll enough to see the change in the rooms.

"Missy done gone crezzie, fo' true," was Celine's muttered comment.

That opinion would have been strengthened if she had followed Miss Isabel to her own room and witnessed her untie with trembling fingers the little package brought from the *rabais* shop. There was first a yellow wrapper to be taken off, then a soft covering

of white tissue-paper, and then a rosy-tinted something unfolded itself.

It was a pink necktie!

Against Miss Isabel's dark, sallow face it was frightful; but this did not disturb her as she complacently tied it, and arranged the flowing ends exactly to balance each other either side of a prim bow. It is doubtful if the question of its becomingness entered her mind at all. She had formulated her dreams according to new light and the new philosophy, and it was in harmony with the departure she had taken. She was well satisfied with the effect.

In the parlor, swept and garnished as it had not been for years, she took her seat and began weaving anew the web of her life. She was like nothing so much as a small domestic spider waiting the unwary fly. It was a strange coincidence, but that evening at precisely half-past seven o'clock there came a knock at the front door which startled Celine. There was a familiar sound in the rap which made her pause a moment to run over in her mind the days of the week, and finally to go to the door

with a confused sense of disorder in the relation of events.

She ushered in Mr. Byrne.

At this moment Miss Isabel's face vied in depth of color with her necktie. Mr. Byrne's expressed a corresponding embarrassment—seeing which, Miss Isabel smiled serenely, and taking her seat at a limited distance, continued to weave her little web.

## CHAPTER XI.

RUINED cabins, broken fences, and untilled fields were the prevailing features of the once beautiful and flourishing plantation owned by the Morants. The dwelling-house, with its broad, sloping-roofed galleries, had offered a brave resistance to weather and water; for the overflow of the great river had deluged it more than once, leaving its sign in the high-water marks upon its walls. About the house were acres of Bermuda grass, whose rank luxuriance overmastered every other growth, and formed a thick carpet of verdure even under the shade of the huge live-oaks and pecans which held their own against time and accident. The grass grew green to the very edge of the bayou in front, whose low banks were bordered by a hedge-like growth of graceful, bending willows. A short distance below, the bayou widened out into a small lake, which was covered by the broad leaves of a species of water-lily, whose seed-vessels contained a

nut upon which in the fall and early winter countless thousands of wild-ducks came to feed.

To the right of the dwelling stood the old quarters, two long rows of cabins fast falling into decay. A few of these were occupied by negroes, whose local attachment had been strong enough to hold them to the old place through every vicissitude.

This little band of laborers, living from hand to mouth, produced in a thriftless sort of way from the genial soil enough to satisfy the present need, and left the future to take care of itself.

The patriarch of this flock was Uncle Dan'l, an aged negro, whose right to rule was never disputed by the younger men and women. He held them in subjection by the exercise of supreme ecclesiastical power. A character of this kind belongs to every ebony-faced community. His importance is in proportion to his ability to stimulate religious frenzy. Once established as the fountain-head of it, his influence is boundless, his authority unquestioned, and his conduct privileged from error.

In days gone by, an aristocratic distinction

separated certain families upon the place. Virginia negroes, who came by inheritance from one branch of the Morants, held themselves superior to the South Carolina connection, and infinitely so to the few French creole, or "gumbo niggers," as they were contemptuously called, who had been brought from the southern part of the State. A marked difference was discernible in the manners and dialect of each, and the greater excellence certainly rested with those from old Virginia. The South Carolina negro had long since gone in search of new fields, the creole negro had sought his Mecca, the Crescent City, but the Virginia element clung to the old plantation.

The conservative spirit of the Old Dominion thoroughly influenced their fate, and they failed to take advantage of their freedom to emigrate, preferring rather to suffer want at the old hearth-stone than to enjoy fulness in exile.

It was with some misgivings that Uncle Dan'l received the intelligence that a change was to come upon the existing order of things, that the place was to be planted upon the old extended scale.



"I doesn't keer to g'way f'm de ole place," said the old darkey to himself; "but dey mightn't like my way ur doin' things." And the thought of any abdication of his dictatorship made him shake his head despondently; but for reasons of state he suppressed his fears and conveyed to his hearers in his very next sermon the hope that the millennium was near at hand. He rolled his eyes and smacked his lips as if tasting the promised sweets when he gave out the hymn—

"Dar rocks an' brooks an' hills an' dales  
Wid milk an' honey flow,"

and he promised the most bewildering results to those who were, like himself, "Jest gwine ter put dere shoulder to de wheel an' holpe to git dar."

"Sho'!" said Aunt Priscilla, his better half, with a sniff of contempt so pronounced that it scandalized the whole meeting.

Uncle Dan'l looked meekly at the offender, and prayed "Dat all po' sinners might have er hang-down head an' er confuse' min'."

"Br'er Dan'l is a mi'ty pow'ful preacher," said one of the members of his flock; "but

yer nebber knows when to 'pend on Sis' Silla. Like as not she's gwine to git huffy an' spile de whole meetin'. 'Tain't so mi'ty long ago sence we wuz down to B'ar Lake 'tracted meetin', jes gittin' our speretual stren'th renewed, an' things wuz goin' on mi'ty fine. Dar wuz Br'er Dan'l an' de rest er de preachers in de pulpit, an' de singin' wuz good, fo' true. Br'er Dan'l kin beat de worl' a linin' dat good ole hime,

“ ‘Here's all my fader's chillern,  
Jerusalem in de mornin',  
Agoin' home to glory,  
Je-ru-sa-lem in de mornin'.' ”

Well, all de sisters wuz er rockin' an' er moanin' when sum 'un axed Br'er Big William to give in his spe'yunce. Yo' know he's mi'ty pow'ful, too, when he gits warmed up, but he's hard to git agoin'. He 'lowed his spe'yunce wasn't wuf much, but sich as it wuz dey wuz welcome to it, an' den he talked an' he talked about his ups an' his downs an' er strivin's wid de sperit till Sis' Silla 'gin to git tired, an' she up an' sez right out in de meetin',  
, “ ‘God knows, Br'er Big William, yo' mouf

orter be glad when yo' eyes go to sleep.' Br'er Big William ain't mealy-mouthed when he gits 'cited, an' he jes' tole de ole 'oman to shet up. At dat yo' orter seen Sis' Silla. She jes' riz up an' rared. She 'lowed dat dat wasn't no sorter 'ligion, an' made sich a racket dat dey come mi'ty nigh turnin' Br'er Big William outen de s'iety jes' to paserfy de ole 'oman.

"I tell yo', man, ef dey lef' de ole 'oman alone, de s'iety 'ud bust up, sho! Dar wouldn't be a patchin' lef'; but Br'er Dan'l kin manage her, dat's er fac'. 'Pears like dat ole man kin manage anybody."

"Yes, dat's de blessed truf', but he knows better 'an to argify wid Sis' Silla. He! he! he!"

"What yo' laffin' 'bout?"

"De way dat ole man manages Sis' Silla."

"How's dat?"

"Yo' see Sis' Silla is smart enuf with her tongue, but de ole man never sasses her back. He jes' gits down an' prays till de ole 'oman is werried out an' gins up. I ain't nebber seen de old man git de wust uv it yet."

"But what's dat about sum 'un comin' to wo'k de ole place ag'in?"

"Jes' sum er Br'er Dan'l's talk, I reckon. I ain't gwine to 'sturb myself 'bout nuffin' tell it comes. Hear me?"

Uncle Dan'l's information proved correct.

Prompted by his father's desire and his own inclination, John Morant had decided to undertake the restoration of planting interests which, with proper care, might be made to yield a handsome revenue. Accompanied by his wife he made a visit of inspection to the plantation. The few happy months of his marriage had been full of honey-moon sweetness, and they both looked forward with pleasure to the "camping-out," as they termed it, upon the old place with much pleasure.

It was Uncle Dan'l who received them upon their arrival with the respectful salutation which he had learned in his youth, "Sarvent, marster; sarvent, mistiss;" while to two terror-stricken boys, who bobbed up from somewhere, he muttered,

"'Pears like yo' can't larn no manners dese days. I'll lay I'll *warm* yo' ef I ketches yo' 'roun' agin!"

The two urchins tumbled frantically over each other in their haste to join a group of

less bold and grinning companions who were bowing, scraping their feet, and mimicking Uncle Dan'l's every movement. Encouraged by Bamma's smile and John's evident amusement, they crowded around to say "Howdy?" and were dispersed only by the moving off of the carriage, to which the two boys, Gabe and Johnson, clung with uproarious delight.

Both the practical and the sentimental sides of John's nature received a shock when he first saw the old place. War had devastated it, and the rich, productive soil had avenged its subsequent abandonment in thickets and undergrowth, which inclined one to doubt that it had ever been reclaimed from primeval wildness. Much of his happy childhood had been passed there, and yet he could identify little associated with it.

"I could almost wish," he said, as he realized its unfamiliarity, "that I had never returned to the spot. The growing up out of illusions is not always pleasurable. All my boyish impressions seem to have been monstrous exaggerations. Fancy me as a little fellow sitting on those steps, believing with

implicit faith that heaven was just on the other side of the willows, and that the world was bounded by the horizon which they touched. My views have broadened since then, but my faith in them has grown weaker, and nothing has ever been quite so satisfactory and pleasing as my narrow world and impossible heaven."

"It is fortunate, then," said Bamma, "that I remember little of my childhood."

"You do not! How is that?"

"Another result of papa's love of travel. I received so many different impressions that each effaced the other, and I remember nothing very clearly."

"Then your first distinct recollection must have been of something very superior in spirit and matter."

"You could never guess it," said Bamma, laughing merrily. "It was so eminently feminine."

"You excite my curiosity."

"I must tell you, then, even if I disappoint your expectations. It was a bead bracelet, given me on one of my birthdays."

"Oh, the barrenness of all theories! You



must confess your world was narrower than mine."

"I would certainly acknowledge it if my interest had been limited to the adornment of my small self, but my bracelet was an amulet, and held a history which made it charming."

"Ah, you went early into the broad field of romance, and now I can trace your superstitious fancies. Congratulate yourself that you will never be brought face to face with any pitiful disappointments regarding them, but rather be happy in having them fall away from you. But see," continued he, pointing to one solitary willow on the bayou bank, whose branches swayed and dipped into the water with the regularity of a pulse-beat, "there is one object which seems never to have changed since my childhood. As far back as I can remember, that old tree has marked time upon the bayou."

And as it was the single instance within reach of his vision which brought back vividly his childish years, it crowded his mind with boyish reminiscences. There was the particular spot where he had tied his small boat; just

on the other side of the dark, rippling furrow made by one submerged limb, he had cast his first hook and line ; from a certain sheltering branch he had fired his first shot, and heard breathlessly the whirl of wings which told his game. He turned at last from a contemplation of it, and protested with a half-drawn sigh against the times and circumstance which had dealt unmercifully with the old place. There was a herculean task before him. The wreck of the place seemed more complete with each new observation. Would he be able to solve the new labor problem and concentrate its forces effectively upon the barren fields? With the devotion of all his energies to the task, would he ever be able to bring order out of chaos, and take the place of the princely landed proprietor of his boyish dreams? Adverse contingencies persistently loomed up, to be thrust aside with the hopefulness of youth and its indomitable will. Spectral disasters appeared and disappeared lightly before his vision, and finally took flight forever before the courage which met them.

He accomplished much in a limited time, and some of his boyish lightness of heart

returned to him when what seemed almost insurmountable obstacles cleared themselves away or became easy to overcome.

If he had suffered a shock at the unfavorableness of his first impressions, his confidence in eventual improvement was stimulated by the good results which soon came to be visible from his efforts.

Never did the world seem so broad and fair as in the early days of that memorable return to the old plantation. He drifted towards an enchanting egoism which his domestic relations were well calculated to promote. Bamma belonged to no very self-sacrificing type of woman, but she possessed in an eminent degree the faculty of secluding her personality; and if John Morant's nature had been less generous, she might have transformed him into the most selfish of men, so thoroughly did she conform to all his tastes and desires. As it was, he delighted in the agreeable sense of importance and suggestions of supremacy which her soft flatteries induced. Appealing to his tenderness, making no demands intellectually, she owned the thoroughly distinctive charm which most quickly subdues and long-

est holds possession of a man's interest and affection.

It was a perfect hour of his life when, at the close of the day, he went out upon the open gallery, and drawing his wife close to his side, watched the calm moon rise and shed her light upon the waste places. The silvery radiance touching the willows made them seem once more the borders of a delectable land. Dark, velvety shadows danced upon the waters of the sluggish bayou, and lost themselves among the water-lilies, while the broad fields seemed less wild under its mild, soft beams, and stretching away in the distance, melted into the far off forest line.

## CHAPTER XII.

AUNT PRISCILLA, as cook and general manager of the household, did credit to her early training. For her assistants she chose Uncle Dan'l and the two boys Gabe and Johnson. It took the combined efforts of all to spread the table for the morning meal. So unusual an event deserved the greatest consideration, and the responsibility almost drove Aunt Priscilla frantic. The sudden promotion to a post of honor was too much for the flighty heads of the boys, and they developed an irresistible tendency to acts of legerdemain. A dexterous movement on the part of Gabe caused the disappearance of a tempting biscuit. Two skilful passes of the hand supplied Johnson with enough sugar to moderately satisfy his longing for that sweet. Emboldened by so graceful and successful an act, he winked at Gabe and leaned suspiciously over a glass of milk particularly rich with cream, which Aunt Priscilla had deposited with much pride at

the head of the table. A lively clatter and rattle of plates brought Aunt Priscilla down upon him. Perceiving his cheeks distended by some unknown quantity, she gave him a sharp box. Her astonishment at the result was as unmeasured as the grinning delight of Gabe and Johnson. She could only gasp as she wiped the fluid from her face and ample bosom.

“You two wants killin’, for a blessed fact!”

It was with the greatest difficulty she could get them into a state of respectful silence again. And, after all, they disgraced themselves forever in Uncle Dan’s eyes. He explained it to Aunt Priscilla as she was busy frying the batter-cakes:

“Jes’ as Mars’ John and Miss Bamma was er settin’ down, an’ I was a pridin’ myself on how dem boys was goin’ to ’member deirselves, Gabe gin a snort an’ den Johnson sniggered right out, an’ dey run outen de house an’ I ain’t seen ’em sence.”

“Well,” said Aunt Priscilla, “ef you’d hump yo’self, dere wouldn’t be no use er ’pendin’ on dem chillern. It’s jes’ like a nigger, wantin’ a *swarm* aroun’ him. I’ll lay dey’d git all dey



wanted in de house ef yo' wuz wuf sumpin' yo'self. Take in dem cakes, will yo', an' hush a talkin'."

"Why, what's I done?" he said, in amazement. Receiving no response save a guttural interjection, he went in the house, muttering, "I'll leave de ole 'oman to sass herself, jes' fur to keep her hand in."

The morning repast proved more appetizing than the surroundings would have suggested. Given a kitchen whose corners have never known a broom invasion, walls festooned with cobwebs that catch the unwary fly, windows stained and dimmed by time, and general disorder triumphant, and within so unpromising a domestic temple an old-time negro cook can prepare dainties that will ravish the most fastidious palate. Aunt Priscilla kept the memory of her former culinary triumphs alive by means of what she called her "Beat biscuits." She could never be taxed with the omission of a single ingredient, or the lack of muscular power to bring them to a state of crisp lightness. Her recipe was a simple one.

"De ingregiums am elbow-grease, dat's all, honey."

John declared that the only fault he ever found with them was the impossibility of determining the regulation number to be consumed. The old woman's face always glowed with delight at a practical appreciation of her efforts. She took Uncle Dan'l to task if he failed to return for fresh supplies, and made it a personal matter when he declared that folks had had enough.

As John rose from the breakfast-table, he said to Bamma, "Can you amuse yourself in this lonely old place for a whole day? Uncle Dan'l and I are going on a tour of the neighborhood, and we may be gone until late in the evening. I do not like to leave you alone, but there seems to be no help for it."

"Do not make yourself at all unhappy about it," said Bamma, "I think I will positively enjoy it."

"What wonderful resources do you depend upon for enjoyments?" said John, banteringly.

"Oh, I suppose," she responded, merrily, "that, as a last resort, I can go to sleep."

John laughed at the words, which suggested one peculiarity of hers which always amused him. While able to sustain any tax upon her

hours of rest, being notably the freshest-looking little creature at the close of any evening entertainment that one's eye could rest upon, she was always ready, day or night, to close her eyes at a moment's notice in a sleep as profound as that of any little child.

"I will return as soon as I can," said he, as she followed him to the door and watched with interest the preparations for departure. There was no gallant steed for him to mount and ride away, as in the olden time—only a small white mule waiting patiently the day's work.

"He don' look peart," said Uncle Dan'l, encouragingly, "but he's de fines' little animal in de country."

John looked doubtfully at the finest, and tested carefully the state of the rope girths which stood between him and a possible fall. Safely mounted at last, he rode off, enjoying Bamma's merriment at his expense, and gazing admiringly at the pretty picture she made as she stood framed in the door-way. He followed her laughing eyes till they rested on Uncle Dan'l jogging along in the rear. The old man was mounted on a wonderfully tall,

rawboned mule, which never responded by any sign to his occasional entreaties of "Git along, 'Mandy!" John signalled his appreciation of the comic aspect of his attendant, and drew rein for his nearer approach.

"We ought to get over a good deal of ground to-day, Daniel, and I am afraid you haven't a very fast animal. He looks as old as you do."

"He, he! Mars' John, you's jokin'. Why, I'se nigh on to five hunderd, an' 'Mandy—well, she's lively yet. Dar's a heap o' outcome in 'Mandy. Yo' needn't be feared about us. De roads ent so bad along here nuther, an' we kin keep along pooty smart."

The road, though not much travelled, was still distinct, and the ground hard, even, and as smooth as glass. One could not realize that at certain seasons of the year this same ground was almost impassable, that the winter rains converted it into a soft mass of blue mud, into which one's horse might sink at any moment, with small hope of extricating himself.

There was no variety in the landscape, only one interminable waste of open land growing

up into a wilderness again. The prodigality of the soil was apparent on every hand. The deserted fields had decked themselves in a fantastic vesture, which only made their forlornness more impressive. A deep dejection settled upon John. The spirit of the dead past absorbed him. In the wreck of prosperity which lay around him he seemed to see, as in a dream, the sorrowful trials of noble hearts who had gone before him, and he felt once more in his own heart the sadness of the times which had tried their souls.

Was it all imagination? or did he remember far back in his childish days, when the fields were like a beautiful garden? Did gangs of busy laborers pass up and down the long rows of blooming cotton, plying deft fingers, and piling the fleecy staple in great baskets that always seemed to overflow their contents? Did he hear the noise of oars upon the bayou, and the corn song floating out merrily upon the air? He checked his mule almost in the belief that the melody was still sounding down through all these years. The garulousness of Uncle Dan'l had been lost upon him, but here it asserted itself.

“We’s nigh de mounds, Mars’ John. Dar’s de ole nabo’hood berrin’-groun’.”

Looking across the open land, one caught a glimpse of three strange-looking protuberances above the dead level of the surrounding country. These tumuli were supposed to be the work of an ancient people; but no antiquarian interest had ever developed their mysteries. They had served to confer a name upon the plantation, and the centre mound, the largest of the three, rising far above the danger of overflow, had been considered a good place of sepulture. Possibly it had served the same purpose in the days of that ancient people of whom nothing was left but these conjectured remains. Many an old negro grave-digger turned up with his spade strange pieces of pottery and odd-looking beads, which he laid away with an abiding faith in their power to work charms.

This place was recalled to John’s memory by Uncle Dan’l as “Mars’ Billy Bush’s old place.” It seemed to open a fresh theme for the old negro’s garrulity. “Of course Mars’ John could not recollect Mars’ Billy. He died before Mars’ John was born; but he was a



mighty fine gentleman. There wasn't anybody as grand as he in the whole country. When he died his place was sold to somebody who never came to live on it. The old house was still standing. Nobody ever touched anything in it, though it was left open all the time, for people said it was haunted—caus' Mars' Billy had killed hisself; that Mars' Billy's spirit sometimes came back and walked around it. It was just over there in that clump of trees. If Mars' John would like to see it, they could easily go in the house."

There was something in the thought of seeing a place dominated by the spirit of such a man that aroused John's interest. He turned into a narrow pathway which led up to the house. Mildewed and gray with time, it stood, the crowning desolation of a devastated land. The solemn stillness of desertion was over it all. A sensation almost of cowardice thrilled John as he pushed open the door and printed his feet on the dust-laden floor; but he recovered himself with an amused smile, as he saw the same emotion exaggerated in Uncle Dan'l's wrinkled face.

The furnishing even of a wealthy bachelor's

establishment in those days was simple in the extreme, and there were no traces here of that luxurious living which had been the wonder and talk of the whole country. The dining-room still retained a few chairs and the plain table around which had gathered hosts of friends to feasts Lucullus might have approved.

The deep baying of deer-hounds had been hushed for over half a century; but trophies of the hunt in the shape of two huge antlers still hung upon the walls.

Passing out of the dining-room, John entered an apartment which had evidently been devoted to a library. Careless hands had scattered the books everywhere. Most of them had been thrown upon the floor. Here the rains of many seasons had beaten in upon them from an unroofed corner of the ceiling, and reduced them to their original pulp.

Projecting from this mass, John saw in a far corner a bit of wood suggesting the frame of a picture. With the assistance of Uncle Dan'l he extricated it. It proved to be an oil portrait, in a tolerably good state of preservation, and was recognized immediately by Un-

cle Dan'l as "Mars' Billy hisself." With deepest interest John brushed away the greenish mould which had accumulated upon the surface of the canvas, and placing it in a good light, he sat down before it upon a high, dry portion of the book-heap.

The touch of the artist's brush had been a skilful one. From a sombre background the face, head, and shoulders of a man of massive proportions stood out in fine relief. There was a gleam of gold upon the red-brown hair and beard. The gray eyes had a half questioning, half mocking glance under their heavy, sleepy lids. The nose was Roman, and the artist had faithfully deepened in it the tint of the ruddy complexion. The upper lip was short, the under jaw heavy and projecting. As John studied the face, a strange sense of familiarity with it entered his imagination. This recognition of a likeness to something known to him grew more puzzling at each attempt to define it. He continued to regard the picture with perplexity, and at last rose with a movement of irritation and turned the face of it to the wall. He paused a moment, then reconsidering his action, called Uncle

Dan'l to his aid, and mounting the high mantle-shelf with all the ease of a boy, hung the picture on a nail just overhead. He rubbed his hands together gleefully at this feat, and springing down, retreated a few steps to see the result of his work. More vividly than ever came out that inexplicable likeness.

In its present position the face lost much of its heaviness, and the eyes their sarcastic gleam. There was a fine dignity in the pose of the head, and a ray of sunshine coming through one single clear spot in the dingy window-panes fell across the face, and lighted it with an expression of genial humor. It must have been with this look that he gathered around him the numerous spirits who enjoyed his hospitalities and his favors.

And now, though ready to depart, John lingered with a feeling of sadness, loath to leave that grand figure all alone, smiling down upon the ruins of his hearth-stone. The eyes seemed to follow him, and the familiar smile haunted him as with a sigh he closed the door and went out in the open air and sunshine.

Uncle Dan'l had busied himself searching the débris of the library, and now recovering

his voice and spirits, which had been much subdued in-doors, approached John, and placed in his hands a curious collection of greenish-colored beads, like polished malachite.

"Dar ain't no use leavin' dis Injun trash in dar. Sum' folks used ter think a heap uv it, an' mebbe you'll like it. Ony way, it's good to keep fo' luck. I'se seen lots er dem beads from de mounds."

"Yes," said John, gazing at them with some curiosity. "They must have been taken from the mounds; but where did you get the idea that they would bring good-luck?"

"Dunno, sah; but dat's what folks allus said. White folks used ter set em in gol' an' w'ar'em. Dey keeps away sickness, sho'. I'se tried 'em."

"Well, we'll take them to your mistress," said John, smiling, as he mounted once more his little mule, "and help her to long life and good-luck."

They turned their way homeward, and the old negro again became garrulous. John listened attentively to the olden-time stories of the country, which had almost passed out of mind, and he asked many questions concern-

ing the man whose portrait had interested him. One old scandal particularly gave him a curious shock. He had heard it before, but never had it seemed so pregnant of evil. It was a story shrouded in mystery, but clear enough in one thing, that human, as well as divine law and statute, had been overthrown by the greater strength of human passion.

It was told dramatically, and as if this was the climax of all converse, the old negro gradually fell back far in the rear and was silent, while John sank into profound reverie.

Where had he seen somebody who resembled that fine-looking old planter?



## CHAPTER XIII.

BAMMA danced along the broad galleries and sang snatches of song in the deserted rooms. Upon one melody of peculiar sweetness she sang such varied changes that Aunt Priscilla, at work in the kitchen, paused to mutter,

“ ‘Pears like all de mockin’-birds in de country is comin’ back to de ole place.”

Her voice rose at first in a joyous outburst, and she dropped her notes in a clear staccato way which might well have deceived the old woman; but the silence of the house gradually told upon her song, and it fell into a soft minor, which finally exhausted itself in a sigh. The day was to be interminable, after all. What was she to do? She gathered up her dainty skirts and ventured into Aunt Priscilla’s sanctum.

“ ‘Deed, honey, an’ ’tain’t no fittin’ place for you,” said the old woman, as she dusted a bench for her; but Bamma sat down, and

very soon found herself listening with interest to stories of the grandeur of olden days which her numerous questions drew from Aunt Priscilla. To ask about the family was to loose the old woman's tongue and start her upon many an absurd flight of fancy. Her stories were all told with an exaggeration of dignity infinitely amusing. It seemed as if the stateliness of some of the old Morants entered the soul of Aunt Priscilla as she detailed their former greatness, but she mixed things sadly in the dates gone by. Bamma grew weary at last of the effort to untangle the maze into which the vivid imagination of Aunt Priscilla led her, and she had to fall back upon the resources of which she had boasted—sleep.

The day was far gone when she was roused from a dreamless doze by a curious sound, which, as she became fully conscious, resolved itself into a prolonged bray from Uncle Dan'll's 'Mandy.

She rushed out childishly, full of life and spirits, forgetting the day's discomfort in the delight of her husband's return. It was, perhaps, her greatest charm that she was always

thus childlike and good-humored. To extract sympathy for small trials was a feminine mistake which she never made; not that she ever thought at all upon the subject, any playful kitten's logic might have been the same.

She clung to John and plied him with questions.

"Was he tired? Where had he been? What had he seen?"

"My dear," he responded, with mock solemnity, "let me give you a word or two of advice which will be well worth your attention. Never ask questions of a hungry man. He has returned to the condition of his Darwinian ancestors, and may be marked 'Dangerous.' If Aunt Priscilla has anything delectable to satisfy the small tiger which has taken possession of me, will you please order it served?"

She uttered a slight cry of self-reproach, and hurried away to see it done; but Aunt Priscilla's training had been good, and she was equal to the emergency of an irregular meal. Very soon John was handling a carver with the energy of waiting appetite.

"Is the tiger sufficiently appeased for you

to be communicative?" said Bamma, at last, no longer able to restrain her questions.

"Did you really think I was so hungry that I could not talk?"

"Certainly I did," she said, in an injured tone. "You have not given me a word yet in answer to all my questions."

"Haven't I? The fact is that I have been busy ransacking my memory for a lost link, but the more I search for it, the more difficult it is to find."

"Perhaps I can help you."

"You? Oh no! It is so far removed from you that you would not have the shadow of a chance in the search. I think I will not even tell you about it until I smoke my cigar."

"Do not make me wait for the cigar," she said, with a little *moue* of disgust, "for then you will be in a denser fog than ever."

"No," responded John, prepared to defend the weed vigorously. "If you could only know what a help it is to the dull brain, how it starts the machinery of that delicate organ without a jar, you would hail its coming with delight."

"Well, if your cigar can arouse you to conversational pitch, I will do as Uncle Dan'l did

yesterday, bring you a live coal from the kitchen, and hold the tongs myself for you."

John declared that the method she suggested was unique, and so very much superior to all modern innovations that he would insist upon her carrying the proposition immediately into effect.

"Fetch the tongs," he cried, pushing back his chair and opening his cigar-case.

She disappeared, and soon returned with the coal held between two small strips of wood, and offered it to him with a courtesy.

"Aunt Priscilla showed me exactly the way old master always had it brought to him, and she enjoined upon me the necessity of 'drappin' a curchy' when I handed it. How do you like my effort?"

"Astonishingly well," he said, regarding her with admiring eyes. "For a novice you are wellnigh perfect."

He touched his cigar to the coal, drew in the fresh clean smoke, and exhaled it slowly with a look of perfect content.

"Old marster's way was a good one. What a pity that it was ever supplanted by wax tapers or lucifer matches! It is the penalty

of progress to deprive us of many a simple, exquisite pleasure." With a mock sigh he linked Bamma's arm within his own and passed out on the gallery.

"You are just in the mood to try another phase of rusticity," said she, disengaging herself and suddenly disappearing in-doors. She returned in a moment with the little bench from Aunt Priscilla's kitchen.

"What are you going to do with it?" said John, watching her with amusement, and advancing to her assistance.

"I want to place it under the big oak. Everything outside suggests such perfect harmony with your present humor. I am sure it will be delightful to sit there."

Like two merry comrades they adjusted themselves to the pleasurable influences of the scene. The evening was beautiful. Trees, grass, earth, and sky were illumined by the radiance of the setting sun. John looked with beaming eyes upon the gilded expanse before him.

"We might make a very Eden of it!" he said, with enthusiasm. "The old place is full of wonderful possibilities."



"And malaria," added Bamma, with mocking sweetness.

"Yes," said John, amused at her pertinent sarcasm; "that is a fatal defect in our Eden. But one would never suspect danger lurking in this atmosphere." He lazily expelled a cloud of smoke, removed his cigar for a moment from his lips, and then returned it with a sudden exclamation. Thrusting his hand into his pocket he brought to view the Indian beads which Uncle Dan'l had given him. "There," he continued, "I had almost forgotten a pretty gift for you, and Uncle Dan'l says a veritable charm against all evil, possibly including malaria."

"Ah!" said she, receiving them with profound astonishment. "How odd! My own beads again!"

"Your beads?"

"No, they cannot be, but strangely like. Do you remember my bracelet—the one given me when I was a little child? I told you it was an amulet and held a history. Wait a moment, I will show it to you; but," continued she, pausing an instant on rising, "what will you say now of my superstition when you find

I am credulous of its merits and have even brought it with me here to protect me?"

She looked so archly sweet as she made her ridiculous confession, that John gave her a tender command with a very indulgent smile.

"Go get it, and I will reserve my opinion."

She returned in a few moments, bringing with her a slender string of green-and-gold beads, fastened with a singularly realistic serpent's head.

Placing it in John's hand, she put the Indian beads which he had brought her beside it. The beads were identical with those of the bracelet—of the same roughly polished stone—and might have replaced each other without chance of discovery.

"What do you know of its history?" said he, with sudden interest.

"Very little, after all," answered Bamma. "My childish imagination builded greatly upon the fact that it belonged to my mother's mother, and was reported to possess some strange, mysterious power for good or evil, just as one desired it. The beads were said to have been dug from an Indian mound on

my grandfather's estate, and mounted in their present fashion for my grandmother."

"Your vivid imagination might make something of the coincidences of Uncle Dan's beads," said John, twining the bracelet in and out, and allowing it to slip slowly through his open fingers. "We must have them set as a companion trinket, and you may believe yourself doubly guarded. I should not care, however, to trust myself to the tender mercies of that vicious-looking snake's head. How will you be able to tolerate two of them? There!" he exclaimed, as he pressed unconsciously the spring of the clasp and fastened it again with a sudden snap, "I believe it has spitefully stung me, for I distinctly felt the pain."

Bamma laughed merrily at his mock expression of horror, while he declared that he was demoralized, and quite ready to entertain any monstrous idea that might present itself.

It really seemed as if the bracelet possessed a curious fascination for him. He contemplated it with a puzzled expression, which grew as he included Uncle Dan's offering. The beads evidently bore some relation to

each other. In both cases the ancient mound-builders had been despoiled ; but for the bracelet, when and where ? Speculation gradually came to be an effort in the delicious softness of the evening, and his mind slowly fell into the dreamy inertness of perfect content.

A mild breeze was blowing, and there was an occasional little gust that turned up the dead leaves, sending them flying about with a gentle vibratory motion. How pretty Bamma looked ! She had loosed her hair, and permitted the wind to toss and turn it into little rings and curls about her head. The wind and the sunshine seemed to bring to her a sweet languor. Curving her arms upward, she leaned against the tree, and the breeze swept around her and over her softly, caressingly. A gleam of sunshine flickered a moment in the branches, then shot a sudden, steady gleam across her smiling face, and then—circumstances lent to that small beam a startling force. Along its golden pathway was borne like an electric shock a conviction which burned itself into John's brain. The strange likeness which had baffled him when he stood before the portrait in that old de-

sented house was no longer a mystery. It stood out clear and distinct in his wife's face!

Was it accidental? What connection did it suggest? And those beads! They rested like a coiled green serpent upon his knee.

The warning of old Celine came back to his memory with the vividness of a lightning stroke, and quick upon it the story he had that day heard recalled. His mind went straight to a conclusion which held for him the bitterness of despair.

That strange, strange likeness! Would he ever be able to trace its origin, and if he did, what would stare him in the face? There could have been no fate so cruel as that which thus confronted him and crucified him in his tenderest affections.

At the moment that this knowledge was forced upon him, Bamma was resting against the tree with eyes closed to the bright gleam playing over her face, and disclosing the tragic element of her life.

John's emotion had touched its profoundest depth when the beam withdrew itself and she opened her eyes. Startled by his strange manner, she sprang towards him.

"Are you ill? Oh, John, what can it be?"

"Nothing," he answered, slowly and hoarsely, looking at her with the expression of one who sees beyond material things into the region of horrible mystery, and then with a shiver he turned away from her. She clasped his arm with a movement of terror, and again appealed to him.

"Tell me, are you ill?"

"Yes," he said, brokenly, "I am ill—I will go in and rest. Do not follow me—I would rather be—alone."

She checked herself as if she had received a blow, and gazed after him as he moved in the direction of the house with a look of pain. He reached a large arm-chair upon the gallery and sank into it, resting his head upon his hands. Then he went over the past and thought out the future.

How slight the evidence that connected her with that old story, and yet how clear it all seemed to him! Would any one else, could any one else, ever trace it as he did? He shuddered while he wondered how much of the sin and shame of it all had been blotted out in the two generations that stood



between time present and that dreadful past ! The boundaries of his own dishonor seemed limitless. An immeasurable waste lay between him and the long-accumulated pride of his ancestors. Revolt swept like a passionate tornado through his soul, and then left him shorn of strength. In the weakness that followed, a boundless pity took possession of him. It was for her who was bound to him by every tie of love and honor. How he loved her ! The vitality of his great affection could never be destroyed, for all the chivalry of his nature gathered to the defence of it. He had incurred a responsibility on her behalf which could never be thrust aside, and in his mingled passion and pain he planned only to carry the burden of it in that way which should never disclose to her the secret of his agony. He could never tell her now the story which had led his mind to such strange results. He must obliterate every trace of the evidence which had been proof to him ; and as this thought came to him a murderous instinct rose in his heart against the presentment of that face smiling down from the walls of the old house, as if in mockery of the deed for

which no vengeance could be wreaked save upon the innocent one. Ah, Bamma! there was the pang! Through and through all his loving thought of her there ran an undercurrent of passionate resentment at his own fate.

Soul-sick and weary, he raised his head. A pair of soft arms encircled his neck, and a voice whispered his name.

No tones had ever been invested with a profounder pathos; they appealed to every generous instinct of his heart.

A mist clouded his vision, and as he drew her close in his arms he silently registered anew his vow to love and cherish her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN struggled against placing an exaggerated estimate upon the suspicion which continually confronted him. Investigation might have disclosed no fact confirming its truth, but there remained always the other tragic possibility. Better a thousand times to live with doubt than come face to face with what he believed to be the shortened measure of his honor.

Reason and argument were powerless against the prejudices which the habits and modes of thought of generations had fixed. His mind had drawn its nourishment from traditions so authoritative that it rose again and again in conflict with the passionate instinct of his heart, and but slowly accommodated itself to the meaning and the inevitableness of his condition.

The struggle with the influences which had moulded his character was long and bitter, and freedom from the galling bondage of re-

sentment was reached only in a state of moral inertia. Some perception of the beauty of that generous, self-forgetting spirit which rises above memories of wrong manifested itself in his bearing towards his wife. An infinite tenderness pervaded his manner, and under the magnetic influence of her sweet, womanly ways he seemed to find justification of his position, and to feel the supreme pathos of hers.

The mental torture which he suffered told upon him physically, but did not entirely paralyze the energy which had directed itself towards the restoration of the old estate.

While the world at large was robbed of all delight for him, while a disenchantment, a sad and bitter dreaminess hung over all his former associations and pursuits, he permitted himself one hopeful anticipation, and the prospect of taking supervision of the affairs of the old plantation grew daily more inviting. He roused himself to an active interest in all details of the work before him, projecting great changes and improvements, and infusing such life and vigor into the dead course of things around him that one might prophesy the regeneration to come.

An inflexible sadness settled upon his handsome face which all of Bamma's gentle and winning ways could not dispel, and she grew restless and unhappy as this conviction forced itself upon her. The days passed and their stay was protracted far beyond the period they had anticipated.

In his sad self-absorption he forgot how lonely she might be in the dreary country-place, and was filled with self-reproach when one morning she timidly approached the subject of their departure.

"Let us go back to the city!" she exclaimed, almost with tears, "and forgive me for wishing to go."

"Certainly," he responded. "We will go at once. I have been cruel to keep you here so long. There is nothing to prevent our leaving, and I can return here at any time that I am needed."

She threw her arms around his neck in childish abandon.

"Ah, now we will be happy again!" And then growing serious once more, she said, thoughtfully, "It must be a long, long time before I can consent to your return to this place. There

seems to be an ugly, melancholy spell about it that I cannot exorcise. See!" she continued, softly touching the shadow of a wrinkle between his eyes. "It has already begun to do its work. We must go immediately."

"Then be ready at a moment's warning," he answered, lightly.

She glided away with that rhythmic movement peculiar to her, eager to begin preparations for departure.

John gazed after her curiously. He had fallen into the habit of studying her attentively, and meditating upon every action and trait of her character. In this mental process there was a significance attached to every trifle. He seemed to be measuring her by some great need apart from the completeness of his own affections, and the result was reached always with a deepening of that melancholy which shadowed his features.

Bamma's spirits rose to a state of joyousness pleasant to see with each degree of preparation for leaving the place. The gathering together of the pretty bits of feminine belongings which had been brought forth from the big trunks to adorn the apartments; the dis-



mantling of the toilet at which Aunt Priscilla had gazed with amazement, and feared to touch ever so lightly with her turkey-tail duster; the hunting of some pieces of finery for a parting present to the old negress—all created a pleasant excitement. There was a happy light in her eyes and a bright flush upon her cheeks when, near the close of the next day, she found herself seated in the carriage which was to take them to the river where they were to meet the steamer for the city. Beyond question she was glad of the possible lifting of the cloud which seemed to have settled upon John's spirits, but she was happy too, in that irresponsible butterfly fashion which chimes in with all movement.

Aunt Priscilla and Uncle Dan'l busied themselves officiously about the packages to be stowed away, the one inspired by the prospect of the withdrawal of a master's eye too far-seeing for comfort, and the other by the gift of a gorgeous shawl which she intended to display at the next meeting. Several negro boys, headed by Gabe and Johnson, darted here and there with a vague idea of being useful, ending all their efforts with a giggle and

an immediate disappearance from the scene, to reappear with a loud guffaw as the carriage rolled away.

"They have gone back to first principles, despite Uncle Dan'l's teachings," said Bamma, listening to their voices and looking back upon them with a smile.

John briefly assented and then was silent. His face was turned towards the old place. He watched it recede in the distance, and along the level surface of the open country before him marked its vanishing lines. As it reached that point where it rested like an indistinguishable blot against the sky, he realized more thoroughly than ever how much had been taken out of his life and buried there. Through a blinding mist which rose hastily before his eyes, he saw another self, younger, hopefuller than he, for whom would come no resurrection this side of the eternal heavens which seemed to touch the place of sepulture.

How firmly the minutest details of the past few months were fixed in his memory! and what torture keener than the sudden rush of them all into his unwilling thought!

Dual voices interpreted his emotion to his inner ear : one a wave of light laughter floating down from the memorable hours of his earliest love, when the light of his own happiness was reflected in every eye ; the other a moan of that fathomless despair which dashed itself against impassable barriers.

Low down upon the horizon appeared the sun. Not like the usual insensate copper globe dropping mechanically below the border-line of vision, but as a gigantic human face with a derisive smile for the lesser life of the world below.

A soft sigh claimed John's attention. He withdrew his gaze slowly, and turned towards Bamma. It was the first genuine sigh he had ever heard his wife utter, and it struck him painfully. He wondered if, with a woman's instinct, she had divined his emotion.

A glance disclosed the fact that her thoughts were not with him. Her sigh was no sympathetic note responsive to his mood, but the audible expression of a sensitiveness touched by some pleasant visual impression. She bent forward with slightly parted lips, exclaiming,  
" There, it has gone at last !"

"What has gone?" he asked, slightly startled by her enthusiasm; but even before she explained, he had caught her meaning and turned his face once more towards the western sky.

"Isn't it lovely?" she continued. "Were you not watching it go down upon the old place?"

He paused an instant before he replied. Consistent with the jeering, heartless face of the great orb was the brilliant after-glow, a trail of red and yellow splendors sweeping for a moment across the drifting clouds, and then leaving them dark and dull upon the leaden sky. To John's mood it seemed a mocking radiance. All perception of its beauty was dimmed, and it stirred a spirit of rebellion against the inscrutable shadows that were deepening around and within him. The despair which might never hope for direct explanation sought every collateral exposition.

"Yes," he said, slowly responding to her question, in a tone strangely emotional. "I have been watching it, and wondering why I should ever care to see it rise again upon my old home."

“John!” she exclaimed, with a long, low, lingering note of surprise, “what change has come upon you? I fancied you loved the old place.”

“Yes, I do love it,” he said, passionately. “How could I help loving it? I drew love of it in with the first breath that proclaimed me a living Morant. It was the heritage of my family. It cradled the hopes and ambitions of my generation, and if it were a thousand-fold greater wilderness than it is, I would treasure every foot of its soil. I have linked my fortune with it again, and will struggle as others did before me, and will probably fail as they did, handicapped by burdens not of my own choosing.”

By no intuitive knowledge could Bamma follow his mood. She could only place her small hand in his, like a child who hazards a caress when it does not comprehend.

The touch of the little palm caused him a pang of keen self-reproach. He strove to gain mastery of himself, feeling something of the deep shame one should feel who strikes at a defenceless thing and sees it turn with pathetic gesture to caress the hand raised against it.

The chivalric sentiments which were the supreme guide of his life recalled him to less bitter thoughts. At once the scene changed for him. Nature seemed no longer unfriendly.

They were passing through a wild and swampy woodland near the river. The main road had been cut like the path of a cyclone, straight and clear through the heavy timber. It was occasionally obstructed by undergrowth, and now and then by a fallen log, which drove them away from the highway into gloomy depths of the wood, where the gray moss swung down from swaying branches like grim skeletons of vegetation. Surfaces which appeared deceptively dry were moist places, into which the carriage-wheels sank, leaving behind them long silvery rivulets, meeting like shining threads in the dim perspective.

The voices of the forest were hushed as they entered its depths; but as they rolled out again into the open way the soft glow of the hidden sun still rested upon the scene, and from every trunk and branch the shrill katydids sounded their notes, and above and below their din were major and minor notes



in infinite variety. As they advanced there came into view a firm, beautifully level road, then a green-swarded levee, and just beyond, sweeping against the frail-looking barrier which held it in bounds, the mighty river.

Those only who have lived upon its banks, and have lost for a time the sight of the grand old Mississippi, can understand the home-feeling which a glimpse of its waters brings. Full of lawless caprice, alternately kind and cruel, it possesses a peculiar fascination for all who have once dwelt beside it. As deep and strong as human passion when pent within the limits raised by man's experience, it betrays upon the surface no trace of turbulence, no evidence of the fierce undercurrent which is sweeping it to the sea; but once the barriers are broken, it riots in heartless destruction.

With all its changes, its wholesale obliteration of boundaries, its swallowing up of men's substance, John Morant loved the river. A hundred times mightier than human passion it now seemed to him. The sight of it calmed his troubled thoughts. Come what might into his life, its current must flow like that of the river, with all its accidental burdens, surely,

irresistibly to the great gulf fixed for its ending. For the moment accepting the inevitable, all bitterness seemed to take flight.

He clasped his wife's hand with a firm, warm grasp. They could but drift together, whatever the gulf might be towards which they were drifting.

## CHAPTER XV.

IN the year following John Morant's marriage, his friends all agreed upon one point, that a curious change had come upon him. The frank gayety which had made him the pleasantest of companions was gone. In its place was a grave listlessness which excited comment. The despondent state of mind which it suggested was not compatible with his surroundings, for it was generally conceded that few men possessed greater advantages in those things which help to make life move very smoothly. Wealth, fortunate ties, and the consequent good-will of the social world, were circumstances calculated to make any failure of happiness conspicuous. Various plausible reasons were suggested regarding it, but none quite satisfied those who knew him. His domestic relations seemed perfect. Evidently the cause of trouble was not to be searched for or found in that direction. No positive clew ever presented itself, and finally

most interested friends admitted that it was an unsolvable problem, and one which they tired of trying to solve.

And yet they were sometimes nearer the solution of the mystery than they supposed.

Among his friends were some who gave thought to the vital questions of the day, and conversation often touched upon the subject which was always cruelly present in John Morant's mind.

His need of kindly counsel and sympathy was great, and sometimes the temptation was strong to place his case fairly before some one who might aid him in the reconstruction of his shattered self-respect. There seemed a possible chance of dulling his pain through such confidence, even if his degradation was made more clear to him; yet pride kept him silent.

In all discussions he listened with bated breath to the voices of small philosophers and greater ones, to the voices of men with views discarded in the Middle Ages, to those with one line of conduct for themselves and another for the world at large; but beyond all philosophy, above all protestations of phi-

lanthropy, rose the still, small, cruel voices of hereditary prepossessions and prejudices, growing sharper and more ferocious with every struggle to repress them.

“How can I be reconciled?” was his perpetual but silent wail—“how can I be reconciled?”

Notwithstanding the gentleness and tenderness of his manner towards his wife, she felt the shadow of the change that had come upon him.

Almost imperceptibly there had grown upon her a sense of mystery in their relation to each other. Every available feminine charm against unknowable trouble, her brightest smiles, her tenderest caresses, were futile to banish it. It settled down upon the household like an unbidden guest, determined to make the most of an unwarranted intrusion. It rested in the beautiful drawing-room, even when they were filled with as light-hearted material as ever gathered together to drive away care. It sat down beside Bamma when she ate and drank. It took its place prominently in the cosey library.

Yes, there was not a shadow of doubt that

the library was its favorite haunt. It was there that it gathered force and thence diffused itself. Tears rose in Bamma's eyes as she thought how pleasant a place the library might be and was not. When the lights were turned up, the fire burning brightly on the hearth, and John had selected his book from the broad, low, convenient shelves, the outward charm of the situation was great, but the brightness and beauty of it became daily less effective.

She was proficient in music, elegant in manners, and charming in conversation; but Bamma had never cared for books. She had never needed them. They had only existed for her as the inevitable ornaments of certain designated spaces. To have taken them from their places would have been simply, so far as she was concerned, distasteful to her sense of order, destroying the sequence of symmetrically arranged series. If she chanced occasionally to remark a gilded name upon a cover, it conveyed little or nothing to her narrow literary experience. Thus ignorant of that which claimed a large share of her husband's attention, she was long incurious regarding the



books which absorbed him; but in time they became the centre of a strange interest for her.

Something of the darkness which was closing around her certainly emanated from the sombre bindings and rustling leaves over which her husband bent with contracted brow and contracted heart. Quatrefages on the Negro Races, Gobineau on the Inequality of Races, Riboût on Heredity, Périer on Ethnical Crossings, Knox on Race, and others. Such perplexing books! Even when she had conned the title-pages and turned the leaves, what could they tell her? What could she ever come to know of Ethnology, Heredity, and all the profound enigmas of Race? Obscurely apprehended as they must ever remain, how hopeless the task of fathoming the interest which led her husband to devote his attention to them! And yet she felt his studies were inimical to her. The untutored little brain could never reach scientific causes; but even unlettered instinct might comprehend effects.

The sinking of her husband's attention in the ponderous volumes was like the withdrawal of the sunshine she loved so well; and there were times when John Morant, rousing

himself from a despairing pursuit of knowledge which should satisfy him of one truth, forgot Nature's tyranny of Selection, her persistent preservation of types, and all the philosophy of the scientific world, in his tender, remorseful contemplation of the pretty little figure which sat by his fireside and smiled or sighed at his will.

But it was not often that they were uninterrupted in their evenings at home. The social life which had been long disturbed, and was still undergoing radical changes, had not become so fixed in the new forms that the pleasant, easy hospitality of one not far removed from a hospitable generation could fail to draw around him an agreeable circle of friends.

Among those admitted to intimacy in the household, who found John's library a particularly pleasant spot, were two men for whom he entertained the highest regard. No two persons could have been found less adapted for a common friendship than the Rev. Mr. Shriver and Dr. Edward Dickson. Entirely opposite in mental constitution, differently educated, holding antagonistic opinions on every subject, hopeless of agreement on any point,

each strong in his own way, the theologian almost passionate in the maintenance of his faith, the physician keenly critical of old beliefs, but broad and more than liberal towards new ones, they might have swung quietly into different orbits but for John Morant. His home was their common centre of attraction; there they met, repulsed each other, and came again to a collision of contradictory forces. With the instinct of a religious patriot the minister was always ready to respond to the wave of a radical red flag, and one always appeared to be flaunting itself in the cool, steady glances of the young physician.

John Morant watched with some interest the rousing of this gladiatorial spirit, for by subtle leading he could sometimes bring his two friends together in opposition upon themes of moment to himself. Most frequently he had only a dull, despairing sense of the weight of traditional reasoning against advanced sentiment; but now and then every fibre of his nature thrilled to some eloquent outburst of that enthusiasm of humanity which often led his medical friend to relax all rules, abandon all special precepts as authoritative guides of

conscience and conduct, that he might follow only the generous impulses of his always generous heart.

It chanced on one occasion that the minister was called upon to deliver an address to his congregation upon a great missionary cause. It was a theme peculiarly fitted to his temperament, an opportunity of indulging his warlike zeal. Delivered upon a day when he was not limited, as upon the Sabbath, by the time consumed in the forms and ceremonies of his church, he was at his best in recalling the historic battle-fields of his faith, in waving the banners aloft with an encouraging cry, and urging the Christian advance. His passionate peroration thrilled his people, and waked the small, keen, alert senior-warden to more than usual interest in the financial result. In the last peal of the organ which dismissed his almost spellbound auditors, there seemed to be a triumphant note thoroughly in accord with the minister's masterful sense of his own able leadership in the march upon hostile legions.

The spirit of his address lingered with him long after its delivery, and gave an increased aggressiveness to manner and tone formed at

no time upon a model of humility. He was prepared to make as vigorous an advance upon heresy as he would have made upon ignorance, and there was something stimulating to this temper in the atmosphere of John Morant's library, when he entered there and found himself confronted by Dr. Dickson.

In the small extension apartment, separated from the library by a draped archway, Bamma sat at her piano playing a characteristic composition of Gottschalk's. Its inimitable mimicry, catching the very twang of an instrument whose vibrating strings seemed to sound all through the unvaried cadences of the simple harmony, was all the more remarkable because of Bamma's delightful interpretation. It was instinct with life. One felt the movement of invisible dancers, the marking of the rhythmic measure by light-tapping feet, and almost expected to hear a merry echoing "Juba" follow the brilliant closing chords.

"Bravo!" said the doctor, half under his breath, as a deep, resonant bass sounded the introduction of another measure, the famous Bamboula, while John glanced towards his wife with a sensation of renewed pain. What pe-



culiar charm did she find in the creole composer's music? And how she abandoned herself to it! So rapidly and powerfully did her delicate fingers give the quick, jerking movement of the "Danse des Negres," that each sharp staccato note seemed a fresh inspiration, thrilling nerve and muscle with a dancing madness.

The fantastic music illy suited the minister's mood. To the grand organ notes which still moved him, it was like a sportive insult. He responded to the doctor's exclamation of pleasure with the assurance that he greatly admired and appreciated Mrs. Morant's skilful performance, but was inclined to criticise her selections. He had little patience with a composer who could waste his talents upon anything as heathenish and devoid of merit as a negro melody.

"It is the province of the artist," said the doctor, "to preserve the distinctive features of a departing generation."

"And the province of the critic," responded the minister, "to condemn whatever may be calculated to vitiate the taste of the rising one." Whereupon the doctor intimated that



the standard of taste was as far from being thoroughly established as its ethical relations were from being beyond dispute ; and with that began a discussion so prolonged that Bamma, no longer inspirited by the consciousness of pleased attention, softly rose, and closing the draperies of the archway, gave herself up to vagrant medleys and thrilling little rouds, always ending in pathetic diminuendos. Through the ensuing conversation they occasionally might be heard as a faint running accompaniment to thoughts and words, which flowed more freely at the sound.

As may well be imagined, when the minister was given a fair opportunity, the discussion could not confine itself to one question. As it passed beyond the original limits, John noticed that Dr. Dickson was less clever than usual in either offensive or defensive argument. He yielded to fits of abstraction, rousing himself at times with apparent effort. Something beyond the minister's logic had evidently impressed him, though he appeared inclined to allow Mr. Shriver the pleasure of believing that it had been invincible.

In the midst of an earnest discussion upon

the influence for good of an open profession of faith, a solemn declaration of principles, the doctor suddenly drew a long, deep breath, stretched himself wearily in his chair, and clasping his hands behind his head, interrupted the minister with the remark "that personal influences were mightier than logical ones in developing the good in man; that spiritual struggles were oftener determined by sympathy than by creeds."

"The principle of sympathy may become too active," said the minister, "and lead one into very grave error. It is necessary to thoroughly fortify one's self against the contagion of misplaced compassion."

"I wonder," said the doctor, with a slight pause, as if doubtful whether he should proceed — "I wonder what you would think of Royston's case!"

Knowing his friend as one who took upon himself the burdens of much of the suffering humanity with which his profession associated him, John Morant felt that he had found a clew to the unusual gravity which had taken possession of the doctor on this occasion. Undoubtedly, Royston's case had been prolific of

troublesome thought. The minister waited a moment for the doctor to continue, and then remarked that he was quite willing to express an opinion should the doctor care to explain the case in question, though his opinion might chance to conflict with the one entertained by the doctor himself. Something like a challenge expressed itself in the minister's tone, and there was nothing left for the doctor but to tell Royston's story.

"You will remember," said he, turning towards John, "that several evenings ago I was suddenly sent for on an urgent call. It came from Royston. He was a stranger to me, and I found him to be a man utterly broken down by hard work and heart disease. His surroundings were peculiar, and excited my curiosity. I determined to know more of him, and to-day, after prescribing for him, I induced him to talk of himself, to tell me his story, a story of such unexampled self-sacrifice that one may well be in doubt whether his convictions have made him a fool or a hero."

The doctor was a restless man when much moved, as he now seemed to be by his own words, and rising from his chair, paced a few

steps back and forth in the room, stopping an instant to listen to a melody which became more sonorous as he approached the archway, and then, once more seating himself, resumed the story.

“ He was once a wealthy planter in the sugar country. Morally he was neither better nor worse than his class; but he must have been a brave and gallant fellow, for he had served with distinction as a soldier. His fortunes were wrecked, his plantation was overflowed and caved into the Mississippi until the remnant of it was seized and sold for debt, and he found himself thrown upon the world an educated, gentlemanly idler, entirely without resources. In the easy life which he had led, he had incurred certain grave responsibilities, and his changed condition caused them to press upon him heavily. One of his old slaves, then dying of consumption, was the mother of four beautiful little quadroon girls. His relation to them was no secret. With her dying breath the poor mulattress besought him to save them from vice and crime, and rear them religiously. What was he to do with them? Through many influences he had become a

sincere Christian, with new ideals, new views, new readings of humanity, and the way seemed open for him only to unique suffering. He could not raise them to *his* level. Only by sinking to *theirs* could he always be with them, watching over them, moulding their habits, and by personal influences making their moral discernment clear. He cast his lot with them. Deserted and execrated by all his old friends and relatives he began teaching, and supported them in an humble way. Driven out of white schools by the feeling against him, he opened a negro school and worked away, solitary and alone but for negro associates. Amid all his profound humiliation he is still an elegant gentleman in speech, sentiments, and manners; but for so long has he been denied the companionship of his equals, that his heart is a great reservoir of pain, and he will die, perhaps, to-morrow as thoroughly despised of men as if he had betrayed trusts and ruined other lives rather than his own."

John remarked, with a depth of feeling in his tone which made the doctor scan his face curiously, that in forsaking the obligations of his birth the man had betrayed a very sacred



trust, while Mr. Shriver looked grave and thoughtful as he acknowledged that the case appealed strongly to his sympathy; that the man's carelessness of his personal lot, except for its advancement of a possible good, established a certain nobility of motive; but in abandoning the brotherhood of his race he had incurred, and must accept and suffer, a heavy penalty.

"Strange," said the doctor, "how intolerant that question of race makes one! I suppose," continued he, directing his words to Mr. Shriver, "that it would be impossible for you to entertain the idea that the barriers which Royston overleaped, and which forever afterwards shut him out from his kind, should never have been erected?"

"Not for one instant could I tolerate any levelling opinions," said Mr. Shriver, obedient at once to his combative instincts and his principles. "I recognize too clearly the wisdom which has builded these barriers ever to calmly contemplate any question of their right to be."

John Morant's profound attention was fixed upon the arguments which followed this assertion.



Mr. Shriver stoutly contended, with Gobineau and other naturalists, that all admixture of races is an abomination; that they differ organically and radically from each other like wine, milk, and water, and that any mingling degrades the higher type without raising the inferior type an iota. On the contrary, Dr. Dickson insisted, with Serres and kindred philosophers, that civilization everywhere gains by contact, mixture, and union. In the struggle which ensues the more perfect type always prevails, and assimilates all the others to itself, providing a new composite form, by which the average level of humanity is always elevated towards higher standards.

"If this were not scientifically true," added Dickson, "still the spirit of caste which is engendered by the enforced separation of the races, whether by law or by public opinion, is inimical to the Christ spirit, and must inevitably give way to the development of a living Christianity."

"Not at all," said Mr. Shriver; "caste is only an expression in the social world of organic and immutable differences which God and Nature, or rather which God for Nature,

has established as the true order of things. The human body is the wisest book of philosophy next to the Word of God. It is the true socialism in living operation. Its various parts and organs differ immensely in dignity, use, beauty, and vitality, but each knows its own place and function, and although thoroughly co-operative with all, never attempts to encroach upon the forms or powers of any of the others. So it should be with the human races. An amalgamated or composite race is like the blood, nervous fluid, bile, etc., all churned up together, a monstrosity productive of disease and death, not of life. The highest Christianity will have been attained when the races, pursuing their radically and perpetually distinct lines of destiny, shall be spiritually united in bonds of charity and brotherhood."

The doctor did not seem inclined to pursue the question. Evidently he felt, as he suggested to Mr. Shriver, that it was harder to break with prejudice and conquer conventionality than to enter upon a conflict with the fiercest heathen that ever tempted Christian conversion. He rose to go; and was soon followed by Mr. Shriver.

Left alone, John Morant remained a few moments lost in bitter thought, then with a sigh turned to his books. He took up a volume on Heredity and soon became immersed in its pages. He read not only of the transmission of mental qualities in both animals and men, but of the return of psychological conditions in children and grandchildren in the most unexpected manner; of a woman seized with a sudden and irresistible desire to steal because her grandfather had been a thief; of a man affected with an unaccountable and ineradicable dread of going into water whose grandfather had been nearly drowned, and ever afterwards dreaded the sight of that element. He suddenly threw the book upon the table and uttered a low cry of pain and horror. A sensitive chord of memory had been touched, and he recalled the singular feeling of dread and terror which Bamma had experienced upon surveying the old deserted slaveyard on her first visit to his father and sister. Neither she nor her mother had ever been in such a place, or knew anything personally of its horrible surroundings and experiences. But the grandmother might have been bought

out of that very slave-pen by Billy Bush, and transferred to his plantation. It was a clear case of psychological transmission. Connecting this startling explanation with Celine's positive conviction, with the distinct likeness of his wife to the portrait of the wicked old planter, and with the two sets of beads from the mounds on the plantation, showing that his wife's mother had come from that locality, he struck his clinched fist against his forehead, and exclaimed, aloud,

"'Tis all too true! She is a white black-bird, and has no mate."

What was his life worth, now that it was all plain to him? His head sank upon his arm. Not even alone, with no eye upon him, could he bear to raise his own eyes and feel the scorching drops just ready to fall. Was he becoming womanish? To what depths might he not yet sink? "Poor Royston!" But *his* degradation had been proportionate to his transgression.

The room grew strangely silent. What was it that he missed? His thoughts involuntarily suspended themselves, and he was conscious only of a dull, throbbing pain, and

the fact that the melody which had all along forced itself upon his attention had been hushed.

Bamma had been startled by his first faint cry. Now she stood in the open archway, to which his back was turned. That agonized expression which she had heard, whose meaning she could not comprehend, that utter abandonment of manner, what did it mean? She trembled violently, and remained perfectly still, half paralyzed with an inexplicable horror.

John felt that she was there, and that he must face her calmly. He turned towards her, and the feeling which had held her spellbound gave place to higher courage as she met her husband's glance.

She advanced towards him. Her face was flushed, and her eyes more brilliant than he ever remembered to have seen them, while a firm compression of the mouth took away the look of soft, womanly indecision which it usually wore. He shuddered as it flashed upon him how like she was to that old picture in the deserted house. She seemed conscious of that thrill, and drew herself slightly farther away.

"John," she said, in a clear, steady voice, "will you tell me of your trouble?"

"I cannot," he responded, feeling in some way a strange, new resolution in her manner.

"Who knows of it?"

"No one."

"Not even your father?"

"No."

"Nor your sister?"

"Nor my sister."

"Nor Celine?"

He was startled. Could he, with her steady, bright eyes fixed upon him, answer falsely? For the sake of those bright eyes he did answer.

"There is nothing to tell."

Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck, and covered his forehead with kisses. Bamma said nothing more, but after that she became possessed of one fixed idea which often translated itself into words—

"It is through Celine I shall hear it."



## CHAPTER XVI.

THE plantation claimed much of John Morant's time and attention. He made many and prolonged visits to it, and became daily more absorbed in its interests. There was a pleasant sense of duty done in overlooking the details of his new planting ventures, and with it relief from burdensome thought. In the fresh green fields, under the open sky, he lost the feeling of man's nearness and all the responsibilities of his social relations. There were even moments when he gained a sense of higher companionship, and came almost to that whispered confidence which sweetens the cup whose first draught is bitterness on the lips.

Bamma protested against his frequent absence, and on one occasion, when he was making preparations for a hasty trip, she urged him to allow her to go with him.

He hesitated a moment as he saw how much in earnest she was, and then declared

that it was impossible. "Circumstances," he said, "are more unfavorable just now than I have ever known them. The river is dangerously high, and with watching the levees day and night I would be absent from you almost as much as if you remained here in your comfortable home."

Bamma shuddered as she thought of the dreary plantation house, with only Aunt Priscilla for company, and recognizing the necessity of the situation, agreed to remain contented if only he would promise to return soon. When he was at last ready to go, and she came to give him a last kiss, John felt her arm tighten around his neck as if it could never willingly loosen itself, and again she demanded his promise to make no protracted stay. He promised, and gently releasing himself, waved her a final good-by.

If he only could have known how much it meant for him!

As already stated, it was something more than his plantation interests which had drawn John Morant away from the city at this juncture. The danger of overflow, the loss of his crop, the shock to his fortune, were all serious

things, no doubt, but there was something still more important, more imperative, and, as he bore the burden alone, still harder to bear. What was he to do with his dreadful secret? He sought the solitude of the country—the soft and equable repose of Nature—to cool the fever of his brain, to quiet the painful throbbings of his heart, to reconcile himself to its burden, and to gain time for reflection as to the best course he ought to pursue.

When conversing so freely with Mr. Shriver and Dr. Dickson about the races and the race problem, he had often longed to confide to them the secret of his own position, and to obtain their advice as to his duties under the peculiar circumstances to Bamma, to his own family, and to the public. But as soon as the question of amalgamation was approached, he shrank back instinctively from its consideration. He dared not tell them what weighed so heavily upon his soul, and instead of being communicative he would sink into a melancholy silence, which became so frequent that it began to excite their curiosity and commiseration.

And how was he to broach such a delicate

and painful subject to Bamma? How could he afflict her gentle and innocent being with a discovery which would overwhelm her with sorrow and dismay? He already perceived by her slightly saddened and questioning face that she was vaguely overshadowed by some apprehension of impending evil. Dearly as he loved her, he wished to get away from her pensive atmosphere for a little while, and ponder alone upon the strange and cruel outworkings of their destiny.

Burdened with such a painful secret, he began to suspect that other people knew it. He could rely generally on Celine's natural reticence and her tender regard for his family, but he feared that the garrulousness or forgetfulness of old age might reveal the facts to some fatal gossip. From certain hints which the little taxidermist let fall, he inferred with a shuddering dread that the dwarfish curiosity-hunter had penetrated other mysteries than those belonging to the animal or vegetable kingdom. He also remembered that he himself, in his own intense anxiety, had made inquiries and put leading questions to various people, which might have already

planted the germs of suspicion in the public mind for a future terrible harvesting. From all these things and the memory of them he wished to escape and hide in the country until he could devise some sure plan to meet emergencies, or nerve himself up to embrace the inevitable.

On reaching the plantation he found the condition of affairs more serious even than he had pictured it, and there followed days and nights of activity and intense excitement.

Situated unfortunately with regard to two or three weak points in the levee on the river front, the place was continually in peril from threatened crevasses. Danger was apprehended throughout the entire parish. Men rode from place to place, agitated and anxious, gathering help from every quarter to repair and strengthen insecure points. In the middle of the night one might expect to be awakened by a stentorian "Holloa!" and urged to speed to Lookout, or Terrapin Neck, or Diamond Island to save the levee. There would be found active gangs of laborers, straining every nerve and muscle in the supreme effort to preserve from overwhelming destruction the fruit of

months of toil, spading and digging, building and strengthening and resting, only to begin anew the work which melted away even as they completed it.

With all his energies quickened by the struggle against the tremendous forces of Nature, John, day after day, and night after night, joined those who exerted themselves to keep the great swollen river in bounds. It rushed and beat against its embankments like a mighty giant. Here it dashed a furious wave over a low spot, there it crept like a thief through a crevice made by some crustacean ally, and bubbled up at the very feet of those contending against it. Checked in its insidious entry by new embankments thrown like elbows from the main levee around the treacherous opening, it swelled and pressed against the strong barriers until it seemed that only superhuman power could curb it.

On the summit of the levee, fifteen or twenty feet above the level of the county, one might stand even with the surface of the stream, and feel the throb of the great artery in its constraint. Far away stretched the low, flat, fertile lands, rich in every element of productive-



ness. Beyond the woodland, which shut it out from the river view, the old Morant place extended like a great open prairie, its broad acres now crossed by innumerable parallel green lines, tracing the vigorous growth of the great staple just coming again into its kingdom. Wherever the eye rested the earth was full of promise, putting forth its abundance in very mockery of destruction. Each green branch grew greener, and the luxuriant foliage quivered defiantly at danger. Man might shudder at the imminent cataclysm, but inanimate Nature, true to established ways, decked herself in gayest vesture on the brink of ruin.

The issue was still a doubtful one, when, broken down by the strain upon mind and body, John Morant was forced to rest, and retired to the plantation to await the end.

Twenty-four hours later, in the early morning hours, a long line of silvery light touched the outer edge of the green fields, and behind it could be seen a dark, dun-colored surface void of shadow—water! water!

Miles distant the mighty Mississippi rushed with a roar through a great crevasse. Here its voice was silent, but slowly and surely it

swallowed up the land, spreading itself into a vast ocean, with only a tree here and there to mark the face of the earth. Inch by inch, foot by foot, it covered the old Morant place, until the waving cotton-fields disappeared and the work of destruction was complete.

When the worst was done, John looked with heavy heart upon the vast expanse of water, under which was buried all hope of reward for the valuable labor of months. Nothing rose above the surface of the liquid waste but the trees, the plantation houses, and in the distance, just visible to straining eyes, the dim outlines of the mounds.

"You orter go over dar," said Uncle Dan'l, as he noted John's attention fixed upon them. "You'd see a quar sight, Mars' John. Ef it warn't fo' dem mounds dar wouldn't be a critter or a varmint lef' in de country."

"How can we get there?" inquired John, upon whom the possibility of traversing the broad waste had not yet dawned.

Uncle Dan'l looked at him in sincere astonishment. "Why, dar's plenty er dugouts around, Mars' John! I kin take yo' dar in no time."

The old negro hastily pushed out from the edge of the gallery on a small raft with which he had been navigating what had been so short a while since the green lawn. He returned in a long, slender boat which rolled from side to side in a perilous way as he paddled it along. Hewn and literally dug out of a solid log, it was scarcely more manageable than one. John took his seat in it, and allowed Uncle Dan'l to steer his way as he pleased over the overflowed fields. Water, water everywhere. One moment the paddle in the old negro's hands cut down deep into the turbid element, and they floated smoothly and swiftly through it, the next instant it stirred the black mud, bringing up from the furrows below the clinging roots and branches of the still living plants over which Uncle Dan'l had to push his way. As the boat neared the one bit of land visible for miles around, John began to understand the negro's reference to it as the place of safety for "critters" and "varmints." Huddled together on the summit of the nearest mound, the length and breadth of which scarcely exceeded a quarter of an acre, was a motley collection of animals—horses, cows, mules, wild

hogs, and one big antlered buck with a doe and fawn whose large, dark, pathetic eyes were fixed upon a wild-cat which crouched wet and panting upon the ground, lost to every instinct but that of fear. Strange companions in misfortune, the fiercest and the most timid equally overawed by the unfamiliar conjuncture. Not a movement disturbed the outline of the group as the little boat approached, but each creature watched it glide across the water with almost human interest. In the silent, hopeless concentration of the brute appeal there was something of human intelligence. It awoke John's keenest compassion, but deliverance could not come through him, and he bade Uncle Dan'l turn his boat homeward.

"It do look like de lion and de lamb," said the old negro, impressively. "It's mighty strange, but dem varmint's ain't gwine to do one anuder no harm. Mebbe a bar or two'll be up dar 'fore night, an' when dey gits rested dey'll jess drap in de water and go off somewhar' else. De oder mounds is all jess like dat."

John scanned the country far and wide. Uncle Dan'l was right. Save the refugees upon

the mounds, not a living thing was visible. There, patiently waiting the caprice of Nature, they lingered, deaf and blind to every impulse but that towards existence itself. He wondered how long the sense of unwontedness might hold them in check, how long the incongruous assemblage might remain without the awakening of that repulsion which could rouse them to a struggle that was now suspended.

The very skies were unkind. A splash of rain-drops rippled the smooth surface of the water, and then a driving shower shut out all distant objects. Gaining the shelter of the broad galleries, John shivered in contemplating Nature's unfriendliness, and he felt the paralyzing power of her darker moods.

Never in the whole course of his life had the logic of events appeared more inscrutable. He seemed to have fallen into a groove of never-ending calamity, and, silent and moody, he saw no outlook beyond it.

The work before him was to alleviate as much as possible the distress occasioned by the flood. There was the stock to be rescued. The poor brute creatures which had escaped



drowning with the first advance of the waters, were to be placed on rafts or platforms built for them. Floors were to be laid in the houses thought to be above overflow, but into which the steadily rising water threatened to come, while boats were to be overhauled or new ones made for the convenience of those upon the place, or for the rescue of others from whom might come at any moment an appeal charged with every element of despair.

To the negroes upon the place the adverse crisis brought a season of gayety rather than gloom. Discharged from all responsibilities and relegated once more to a condition of dependence, they fell very readily into the easy, pleasure-loving ways of the olden times. Loud laughter issued from the cabins, and out upon the water one heard the boat songs swelling and dying away with a monotony of effect peculiar to the minstrelsy of the music-loving African, while the echoes brought back harmoniously the single voice or full chorus. Beside each door-step in the quarters, planted lightly in the mud beneath, was a long, slender stick used to mark the state of the flood. Great interest was manifested in the frequent



consultings of these registers, but whether the report was "rising" or "falling" or "on a stand," it was followed by explosions of merriment, greatly increased by the flutter of wings and answering cries of the feathered stock taking refuge upon roof, chimney, and gallery.

Terribly lonesome were the long evenings, when John sat amid the deepening shades on the long gallery of the old plantation house, fighting off the gathering mosquitoes, and listening to the dull slosh of the muddy water all around against the houses and fences. Then would his meditations take on a most sombre hue. The questions of races and heredity would come up in their most formidable shapes. His intense love for Bamma would reconcile him to their individual union; but what of their progeny? Would they not revert to the darker type? Would they not betray with successive generations the ignoble marks of African descent? Then, if such marriages were not mere *liaisons*, but genuine marriages, they must be as allowable and justifiable to other parties as to themselves; and if miscegenation should become general, would not the whole Southern race, of which he was in-

stinctively and organically proud, be precipitated headlong into a gulf of degradation, degeneration, and despair? Was not his own unfortunate *mésalliance* a proof and a prophecy of the possibility of a general drifting towards that gulf?

Ceasing to confront these general questions, he would then turn to his personal interests. He would debate with himself whether it were not best to break away at once on some plausible pretexts, and go to Jamaica or Mexico, where the race barriers had been already broken down to a considerable extent. No, he would vehemently exclaim,

“Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.”

Every night he would fall into his late slumbers resolving to accommodate himself quietly and bravely to his fate, and every morning he would awake with the old, heavy burden upon his heart. After many days of anxious thought and suffering, he saw that he had made no progress towards the solution of what he considered the formidable life-questions that stared him in the face. He lost all interest in the plantation, and without having any act-

ual premonition of impending evil, he began to think more constantly and tenderly of Bamma than ever before, pity contending with love in his regard for that beautiful and innocent woman, bearing unconsciously in her delicate veins the curse of tainted blood.

For the present there was nothing more to be dreaded on the plantation. Measured by previous years, the water had done as much damage as—unless it rose beyond all precedent—it was likely to do. Until it began to recede the master's presence would not be required, and John made preparations to leave.

Even before he left, there came a summons for him to return home. Care had been taken to avoid alarming him, but the tidings conveyed were of the serious illness of his wife.

All other troubles were dwarfed in the anxiety which took possession of him, and in a state alternating between hope and despair he began what seemed the interminable journey which separated them.

As he passed through the swampy woodland near the river, it was denser and darker than ever. Among the floating logs and other drift which gathered to obstruct his way,

the little boat which he cautiously steered was frequently in danger, and from the overhanging branches the gray moss occasionally swept over him, damp and chilly as the touch of Death. Often as he forced his way along he recalled that other journey, when Bamma had been beside him, fascinating and pleasing to every sense, pliant and loving, the very incarnation of full, rich life. Shrinking from a thought which smote his heart with cruel force, he tortured himself with a vision of life without her presence; and again admitting some light in all his dark forebodings, he experienced the reaction of full hope.

As he took his seat upon the deck of the steamer at the river landing, and watched the swift current sweep by him towards her he loved, he could not believe that it would bear him to anything but her bright and loving smiles.

The sound of a great bell startled him. The boat was pushing out from shore. He looked up and caught the eye of the captain as he gave the last vigorous tap.

"Dreadful hard luck for these people, ain't it?" said that officer, reflectively turning his

good-natured face towards a point of land for which he headed. "But then luck is always down on 'em, there's no denying that. It might have been the drought, or it might have been too much rain, or it might have been the army-worm. They all come in their turn."

John nodded assent.

"But I have been going up and down this river nigh thirty years, and I declare I never saw anything worse. There's a fine place now just back of the landing. You can see the house in a clump of trees behind the levee. I tell you I hated to see that place go under. It belongs to a *nice* woman," and the captain ran a gamut upon the word "nice" which made it comprehensive.

John responded with a monosyllable which might mean anything, a simple assent or the intimation of a desire to hear more.

"Yes, she's a nice woman," continued the captain. "I know her; I know everybody along this river-bank. She's a widow."

A contemplative smile spread over his broad face, as if he were not averse to dwelling on that fact.

"I don't recognize the place," said John,



trying to identify the desolate picture; but there was nothing in the place before him to recall any former memory of it. "The river seems to have changed its course here."

"Yes," said the captain, "the house used to be a mile or two back from the levee; but the river has washed in here and taken a slice out there, and forced them to move the levee so often that they are now afraid the next move will carry it behind the buildings. If the big river don't begin to make a sand-bank in front, as it did at Berry's, we'll have to say good-by to the old Marston place."

"Marston?" said John. "There was a large family of that name. I remember them very well."

"Mighty good stock they were, too," said the captain, impressively.

John answered heartily that he believed they were, and asked what had become of them all?

"Dead, all dead, but the widow. She's had a hard time of it lately; but I remember the time," said the captain, "when nothing in this wide universe was too fine for her. I wonder what her old grandfather would say if he could see her now. You never knew old man Tur-



ner, did you? No, that was before your day. Well, that man's pride was about the biggest thing I ever knew. Why, one day when we were all hurrahing over the last election, he swore—I can just see him now as he stood in the cabin of the old *Southern Belle*, with a sneer on his face, and swore that his hat had never gone up, and never would go up in the air for any man. He hated democracy, and declared it would yet ruin the country; that no one could tell what his children might come to, and, for his own, he hoped that fifty years after his death his blood would run in no man's veins. It does look as if his desire is going to come to pass."

Brutal as the patrician's wish had sounded, John felt a responsive thrill. Extinction might be, after all, the kindest destiny.

"Are there many of the old families left in the parish?" he asked.

"Very few," said the captain, "and they are mostly represented by widows. The fact is," continued he, emphatically, "that country is chock full of widows."

"Naturally enough," suggested John, "when so many lives were given to their country."

The captain's explanation was significant. "No, the war was not responsible for it all. There had been another mighty agent at work." His voice fell to a whisper as he enunciated it: "Whiskey!" There hadn't been a man in that country for two generations who didn't drink like a fish. They had a notion that it kept off the chills; but his private opinion publicly expressed was that the fashion was set years ago by Billy Bush, and nobody had ever had the courage to change it.

"You've heard of Billy Bush, haven't you?" he asked; "splendid old fellow he was too."

John nodded his head only, and moved away. The old captain, somewhat disconcerted, looked after him with a significant grunt, and then he too moved off to console himself, probably with one of Billy Bush's favorite mixtures.

John lighted his cigar and paced the deck restlessly. Billy Bush again! Was that name always to pursue him? Had the man so impressed himself upon the world that he could never lie forgotten? What other sins might not yet be laid to his charge? Was there no

way to escape the wickedness of this transgressor of every law, social and divine?

The night wind blew softly, and weird shadows danced upon the water, and he felt as impotent against the influences which he fancied had entered into his life through the far off dead as he was powerless to stay the wind or grasp the shadows.

"Concealment," he muttered, "concealment is now the only hope; concealment from Bamma, from my family, and from the world." For he foresaw in the promulgation of his dreadful secret the agony of his wife, the misery of his proud relatives, and the social ostracism which would inevitably follow.

## CHAPTER XVII.

BAMMA declined visibly after her husband's departure. She became subject to spells of abstraction and despondency which quite alarmed her friends. A sudden illness impelled them to inform her husband of her condition, and to solicit his return. She recovered, however, more readily than was expected, and was able to resume a daily ride in her carriage.

It was towards the afternoon of one day that she prepared to make a visit which had become one of pleasant duty since her marriage.

Down in the old French district she was always received with a warmth of welcome very grateful to her childlike nature, and the pleasant greetings of the devoted sister, and kindly smiles of the gray-haired old gentleman, whom she now called father, were potent to dispel any prejudices which the strange illusions of her first visit there might have engendered.

How well she remembered that first visit ! To-day its details were more vivid than ever—the very clearness of the sky, not dimmed as now by the white cumulus passing over its deep blue, the fresher breeze, the enchantment of her new position, and John's eyes so eager and tender. Surely she who then turned her head with fine coquetry from that ardent gaze, and lifted it with outbursts of lively curiosity and whimsical assertion, was other than the young matron now leaning against the soft cushions of the luxurious carriage, very pale, and languid with the unusual warmth of the initial summer days, but smiling with the superior little smile which comes upon the face of a woman quite satisfied with her new kingdom. And yet she was vaguely conscious of the cloud somewhere over her head.

Every turn of the way brought fresh recollections. As she passed the taxidermist's shop she stopped, for she fancied she saw in the window, in the place of honor once occupied by the great alligator, a new specimen, an unique sample of the taxidermist's art, a white bird with out-stretched wings, just ready to take flight from a moss-covered globe. There

was no doubt of it. It was the little man's treasure. What an air of grace was there in the light poise of the delicate frame, the instant of gathering force for a strange venture! it might be in search of better "compagnie" than any he had ever found upon the globe he was leaving.

It was all Marie's fault, the little man explained. She had been too kind. There had to be a limit to kindness. One must know how much, and what to give, when they have the opportunity of giving, and Marie had not been wise.

"An' so yo' see fo' yo'se'f," he said, disconsolately. "But I keep my word, madame. I haf yo' name, an' I sen' heem to yo' soon."

"You have my name?" said Bamma, in some surprise. "Then you know that I am Madam Morant?"

"Ah, oui, madame," returned he, "I see yo' 'usban' sev'al time."

So John had not lost his interest in the little shop, thought Bamma, as she left it. What was there in it that attracted him? And the curious bird which pleased him, or did it please him? Any way it was at last to be theirs.



She smiled as her tasteful instincts failed to imagine a decorative position for it. If it had been of its own proper color, there was the library. Yes, she and John had discussed the raven that was to be placed just above that door.

That thought of the library was oppressive. With it something of the brightness of the day past and the day present was blotted out. Most distinctly was revived the impression of that evening before her husband had gone away, when she had desired his confidence and gained only a strange conviction. Why had it never occurred to her before to act upon it? His trouble might be, after all, a family affair, with which he did not care to burden her, and which she thought she ought to know. At any rate there could be no harm in simple inquiry of the father and sister; and even if she consulted old Celine, what impropriety could there be in that? Was she not a faithful old nurse, discreet and deserving of confidence? And if once she had a clew to that inexplicable sadness, might she not be able to soften it? The image of herself as his comforter caused her heart to swell with joy,

and thrill with delicious emotion. "The first opportunity, yes," she whispered to herself—"the first opportunity that comes to me, I *will* know."

She was somewhat startled when she arrived at the house to hear Celine assert that her master and mistress were absent. Had such an extraordinary thing ever happened before, and when? Even old Celine's face showed traces of astonishment and perplexity.

"I do not understand it," said Bamma. "Are they visiting some one?"

"No, madam," was Celine's brief response.

"Then where can they have gone?"

"To the lake, madam."

What other assertion could have been more preposterous? None but the answer which Celine gave to the next question.

"With whom have they gone?"

"Mr. Byrne."

Bamma could not restrain a merry laugh, which woke the echoes of the old hall, though it did not bring a change of muscle in old Celine's face. Certainly affairs were becoming significant. The dawning sentiments of Mr. Byrne had not been unobserved, but this re-

markable evidence of progress was an amusing surprise.

If she could only have seen the strangely associated party on its way to the old-time pleasure resort, the unaffected good-humor of the major, whose eyes were still closed to any motives upon the part of his old friend but those of pure benevolence, the prim demureness of Miss Isabel and the half concealed agitation of Mr. Byrne! Would Miss Isabel ever tell of that dashing drive down to the Lake Pontchartrain, over the broad, level, white shell road, incomparable but for the unpicturesque and odorate dairy farms upon the one hand, and the sluggish canal on the other—a drive which brought new life to the old major, and a wealth of ancient memories, of which for once Mr. Byrne was intolerant. Then the dinner. The open dining-room fronting the water, over which came the freshest, balmiest breath of air that ever comforted tired lungs, the neat little table for three, the menu, which Mr. Byrne's long bachelorhood and experience had insured should be perfect—all were luxuries too infrequent for Miss Isabel to fail to appreciate them, and regard with

increasing favor the dispenser of them. And was it very wonderful, after all, that in her poor, half-starved life, with its hereditary fitness for the enjoyment of all the good things of the world, she should long for a continuance of them and see the possibility of it in the position she was sure was about to be offered her?

It is impossible to say how much Bamma enjoyed the mental picture she made of the aged wooer and the probable result of his wooing, and how light-hearted she suddenly became. Could it be possible that this impending change in family relations was a matter of grief to her husband? Was this the trouble which had clouded his brow? Did he feel so seriously the slight ridicule which might be attached to the step which his sister would probably take? For a moment the suggestion seemed conclusive, but then—it did seem insufficient—it did not satisfy her.

Perhaps it was because the opportunity of talking with old Celine might never again so favorably present itself that the desire to do so grew and grew until she felt that it had become the one thing which could rid her of

that haunting conviction which had seized upon her so suddenly, which had surely been based upon nothing, and might as quickly be driven from her mind.

She would not speak hastily. Her words must be chosen fitly, not to compromise her dignity. Celine had remained standing beside her, silently and respectfully awaiting any commands or instructions to be left for the absent ones. Bamma now dismissed her for a while.

"I am going in for a few moments to rest," she said, entering the parlors. "You may come again when I am ready to leave."

She could not understand, when she had chosen to seat herself in the old major's chair, why she suddenly began to tremble so violently. Was it wrong, after all, to seek to know what her husband had desired to conceal? and was she taking an unfair advantage in her method of discovering it? The doubt held her long in suspense; but argument and reflection were powerless against the combination of circumstances so inviting to her first impulse as this now presenting itself.

She could hear Celine moving to and fro at her work in the adjoining room. She had but

to call softly and the old negress would be beside her.

“Celine!”

“Madam?”

Could it be true that she had not called at all, nor had Celine responded? Her courage rose as she laughed at the trick her imagination had played her; such things were frequent with her, and she was becoming used to them. The situation now seemed less difficult. An advance had been made in framing that mental summons, and the wheels of action slightly started gained momentum until the impulse was so far strengthened that she really uttered the call.

“Celine!”

“Madam?” answered the negress, softly entering the room.

“Did your mistress tell you at what time she would return?”

“No, madam.”

“It has been many years since she has gone out much.”

“Yes, madam.”

“And you have been with the family all your life, have you not?”



"Yes, madam."

"You were my husband's nurse, I believe?"

"Yes, madam."

How respectfully laconic the old creature was! How different from garrulous Aunt Priscilla, with whom one suggestion would have opened a store of family knowledge! Starting so far away from the point she desired to reach, Bamma felt the difficulty of dealing with so unpromising a subject. But even Celine grew more communicative under well-directed questions of the childhood and youth of him whom the old negro "mammy" had never ceased to think of as "my baby," and she related at last, more effectively than her rigid, unsmiling face would have promised, a laughable but innocent escapade in which he had been engaged.

"He was always very gay, was he not?" said Bamma.

"Yes, madam, but—"

A strange expression came upon the woman's face.

"But what?" inquired Bamma, feeling that her look meant a great deal.

"Mars' John is change'."

Then she, too, recognized the fact; but did she know why? Something in the black eyes warned Bamma of a knowledge of evil which might touch her sorely. But what prevision of fate ever checked the advance of it?

"Yes, I know it," she answered, growing a little pale, and shrinking slightly from the acknowledgment. The black eyes were still fixedly regarding her, and Bamma fancied she detected an expression of dislike towards herself in their glassy stare.

"And because you have nursed him and known him all his life, I would like to ask you something. Do you know of anything that could make him unhappy?"

"Yes, madam."

Bamma was sure now that it was hatred that gleamed in Celine's eyes, and she comprehended that something sinister menaced her peace; but it only increased her desire to know.

"Will you tell me what it is?" she asked, very gently.

What could have possessed Celine that she lost all fear of John Morant's anger, and was ready to betray the trust which he had thought

safe with her? Could it be true that among the finer classes of her race might be found a prejudice as deep and strong and intolerant of any commingling of blood as ever existed in the heart of Celt or Saxon? Did it tempt her to strike down and pursue the innocent victim of it, gloating upon the anguish of the sore oppressed. Nothing less than this could account for the disclosures she made.

She did not tell it all at once. Little by little, pressed by questions upon points very obscure to the foreign education of her listener, upon whom the whole horror of the wretched story dawned slowly, monotonously and briefly she responded with words which stimulated inquiry. And this was the substance of it all.

There was a likeness which she had recognized that first day when Mars' John had brought the madam there—a likeness to a family—she would not say what they were, but they had lived many years ago in that little house—she could show it to her. No? well, the madam could see it as she went out. There was no mistaking the likeness—there was just the same face, the same eyes,

and even the three little black moles under the lashes. The madam must know for herself they were very curious, and they were just like those of the young girl who had been sold to the plantations when she (Celine) was very young. And there were other things which anybody could see. She had warned Mars' John. Why had she done that? Because she had her suspicions. She could not let Mars' John suffer through *those people*. And he had found out what she thought was true. How, she could not tell, but it was very soon after he married; she had no need to ask him, she could see it. And he was not satisfied, she was sure. He had asked her many strange questions, and she was sure he was trying to find out. There was one man who knew a great deal about everything and everybody. Mars' John sometimes went to see him. He was a funny little man, always prowling around old places and hunting up strange things. She had seen him a great deal in the neighborhood lately, and he had asked many questions. He could find out, if anybody could, that madam was in some way *kin to those people*—and they were—negroes.

There were no more questionings. Against the chair the little white face with its closed eyes was very like death. Celine was startled. She advanced a step, but the eyes opened, the small hands waved her away. Not near *her*—not a step must she approach.

Was this the result of her desire to know? She suddenly felt herself covered all over with infamy, though not a word of that story could be true. She had followed it wonderingly at first, for it seemed very far away from her, very absurd. That easy solution of the old negress's manner, a doubt of her sanity, was instinctive with her; it had been so with her husband when he had first listened. What folly, that she an English girl could be so strangely like one dead long enough ago to have faded out of the memory of the aged creature before her. And even so, what connection could there be in that with her life or her husband's happiness. Never had there been a relative of hers in this country except the mother now lying in the quietest, prettiest graveyard in England, and she had been far removed from this horrible place. Yes, she was beginning to think it *was* a horrible place.

The portraits of the Morants upon the walls, stiff as wooden soldiers and sawdust dolls, had an air of understanding it all, and seemed to look down upon her oh! so contemptuously, that she should be listening and shrinking from the utterances of their negro slave. She would have hushed her then with that fine air of authority learned in her own land, where authority was something to be respected, but she had just reached a hideous fact, that John believed it! This accounted for his sadness and all his curious studies. And this creature knew it! Oh, that she could escape the insult!—could hide herself from the shame of it! She closed her eyes that she might forever shut it out. That icy feeling so like death was at her heart, and a great pulsating wave swept towards her brain. One thought sustained her. It was that of escape from the place where she had been thus cruelly wounded.

Without a look, without a word, she rose and passed through that door never before inhospitable to one who reached its threshold.

“For the last time,” she whispered, too low



for anything to hear but the light breeze which touched her cheek softly and tenderly as if it knew.

And then Bamma saw the last vision that the old French district would ever conjure up to distract and bewilder her senses, a clairvoyance never more to be granted her. As she raised her eyes full of the tears which had come to relieve the great burden of her heart, she saw the little house, that one silent and deserted of life, closed to the world, and waiting the completion of decay. Beyond the bolts and bars and fast closed shutters she saw a spectral home, the confrontation of that remote past. A sudden relaxation of the body, a droop of the pretty head, and Celine, who had silently followed her, held Bamma in her arms. She was not unconscious, but white and still, just as she had rested in the major's chair, she leaned against Celine's breast, only in the wide open eyes one saw no trace of the horror, the indignation which had then possessed her. A senseless terror dilated them, a terror of *that* which had confronted her, and the meaning of which was at once clear to her sympathetic faculties.

"Take me home," she said, as calmly and authoritatively as her shattered strength would permit. "I must go quickly."

And without a protest she allowed the old negress to lift her, and to hold her tenderly while her instructions were obeyed. When she reached home she had still to be lifted from the carriage, and she seemed to cling closely to Celine, whose once strong arms were yet able to bear the light burden.

They placed her to rest a moment on a lounge in the room where the large, square window let in the sunshine, and the boughs of the live-oak swayed across it. She smiled faintly as she recognized the familiar shadows, and she watched with interest a great golden butterfly which had settled on the upper window-panes within, and calmly waved back and forth a pair of showily striped wings, while a green chameleon outside struck at it with its snake-like head, once and again with no success beyond the dull rap which told its discomfiture. When they had taken her to her own room she called Celine to her bedside and said,

"You are a good nurse; you must stay with me. I shall need you."

Afterwards she asked to have brought to her a small box, which she slowly opened; then took from it the well-remembered and well-cherished bracelet which she had shown to her husband as possessing power against all evil, and clasping it around her small wrist, seemed more content.

As if that mere holding of the fainting woman in her arms had been the spark to kindle a sentiment akin to one which seems always to linger in the soul of a negro nurse, the love of the little ones whom she has once held to her bosom, Celine watched beside Bamma faithfully through the agony which the night brought. For the great pangs of premature motherhood came upon her, and the doctor, hastily summoned, sat by her bedside for hours.

Towards the morning, when relief from pain had come, the doctor having retired, the old negress believed that her patient was sinking into a pleasant slumber, and she, too, sitting at the foot of the bed, nodded and slept.

The morning was not yet come when Bamma opened her eyes. Something had awak-

ened her which sent a thrill of pain along her sensitive nerves. It was a mocking-bird in the live-oak, singing with all the vigor and variety of tone which makes him sometimes sweet, sometimes satanic.

How oppressive were all his notes! The pathetic warble, and the rise through every gradation of melody to the shrill whistle and derisive call so startlingly distinct in the still night air. There seemed a cruel fun in every trick of the voice which tortured her. Under it the despair which had been a dull leaden force became active. Her defence was so feeble.

It was only the reiteration of denial. That suspicion was not true, but—John believed it, and was wretched on account of it. With that little taxidermist upon the track, what might he not discover? Was there to be no escape from it? Could she not save them both from the infamous facts which might be revealed? If only she were out of the way, it would all be well with John.

And then from some secret store of consciousness was telegraphed *the way*.

Did that sudden death—that suicide—that eternal sleep entered upon years ago by the old man, whose deeds still carried their terrible consequences—did that shape her resolution?

What a mixed nature was hers! Simple, light-hearted as an innocent child, and as timidly trembling at the least sound or shadow which her inexperience determined as inimical to her, and yet serene and resolute at the thought of death. It is easy for the grandchild of a suicide to commit self-murder. In the dim light of the room she could see Celine's turbaned head and dark face, with a gleam of the golden ear-rings swinging to and fro with every deep respiration. Yes, she was asleep; those black eyes were closed and would never more disturb her. It was not possible for her to see what was going to happen, only, she would know first of all, and would she keep the secret of it? What would they think then? That she had sunk exhausted under that agony through which she had passed? Sudden deaths under such circumstances have often occurred. She raised her hand, and the green bracelet slipped back

from the wrist and tightened itself about the well-rounded arm.

It had not been an amulet, after all. A contemptuous anger possessed her against the senseless stones. She would have thrown them far from her, but a thought restrained the impulse. "She must not wake Celine." So with set face like a passionate child she tore them apart, bead by bead, crushed them in her restless, weary hands, and dropped them one by one beside her.

A great loneliness fell upon her, and a quick compassion for her own fate. The tears forced themselves through the fallen lashes and rested upon her cheek. But they were the last which she was to shed. That thought she received with a triumphant rush of blood through her veins. She would escape her own social desolation and restore her husband's peace of mind by the same stroke. It seemed to her that there was no alternative.

Close by the bed was the table which held all the articles suggestive of the watch beside the sick: the goblet, the spoon, the little square box, half opened, displaying the neat white packages within, the small bottle of



ruby-colored liquid, and one other, clear as crystal, with a conically folded napkin beside it.

There was still in the room a faint ethereal odor which betrayed the contents of the clear white bottle, and that it had already been freely used. It was this chloroform which fixed Bamma's attention.

"Oh, John!" she exclaimed, "this will lift the heavy burden from your life. Take care of our child."

An instant later the ethereal odor had grown heavier in the room. It oppressed Celine, for she stirred with a slight cough, then rested her chin upon her breast, and nodded once more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hours after, when John drew near his home, there returned upon him a great dread. The hope that had sprung up in his heart died out. So much of happiness had escaped him that he accepted the fate before him in the full assurance that its darkest shadows were to close around him. As he approached the house the sinister look of its surroundings were in keeping with his mood. The breath of a hot

day had passed over the pretty garden, and left plants and greensward dry and withered. The branches of the live-oak hung lifeless in the general stillness. The door swung open in a hopeless manner, suggesting sorrow rather than welcome for the one that would pass that way.

He went in.

It was not necessary to tell him what had happened. There, in the room where he had wooed and won her, where life had seemed to sparkle and glow with the entrancing freshness of youthful passion, where it had held for him the tenderest, purest hopes that had ever garnered despair—there in the solemn stillness which touches the soul with keener agony than audible sorrow, there in calm rigidity was the face he loved so well, smiling in its dreamless slumber almost as it had done when in that last pressure of his arms he had promised no long absence.

Through the broad, open window the sunshine streamed and quivered as it sought and touched the hands that would never more lift themselves to catch its warmth, and following its beams one might see them playing lightly

upon the little white bird which some one had placed in the midst of the flowers with which they had surrounded her. It was the little white blackbird of the taxidermist's shop. No one at the funeral, except John or Celine, would suspect its dreadful symbolism.

For once Death had been kind. In that eternal sleep was blotted out every record but love. She was gone while yet John's heart was kindled with the fire of his chivalric passion—gone before the slowly accumulating forces grounded in his being might rally to quench its light. The union founded against a prejudice so strong that no hypothesis can be constructed deep and wide enough to include the problem of its existence, had been dissolved, and for once, one might repeat it, Death had been kind.

When John Morant had passed out of sight of the face which would forever abide in his memory, some one came to him and, softly touching him on the arm, spoke a few words which scarcely conveyed any meaning to his bewildered senses. He looked into his sister's face, while her words, slowly repeated with loving tenderness, became distinct.

"It is a boy, John. Your own son, prematurely born, but still living, and we hope for the best. Do take him to your heart!"

She pointed to a helpless bit of humanity nestling in her arms.

His son! Had he a son? He looked at the small frail creature, whose pitiful life had outweighed that dearer one. All the bitterness of months gone by again flooded his soul. He felt that he had been singled out alone of all men for the irony of fate. His son! No fatherly love, no parental solicitude welled up in his heart for the child. Instead, a violent repulsion overcame him. His son! Was this to be the representative of his race? He gazed hopelessly at the new type, the new heir to the old name, while his hard, cruel thoughts took form.

"Will you always carry in your veins, mingled with the blood of the Morants, a degenerate stain? Can no measure of infinite love and compassion blot it out? Must I always be pitiless to you? Is Nature inexorable? What transgression of her laws makes me her victim?"

He turned away in despair. The burden

had been lifted in one shape only to be imposed upon him in another. The little one, as if in pathetic appeal, cried out, and Miss Isabel, with that fine motherly instinct given to every good woman, drew him close to her heart and hushed his wail.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS ISABEL made no mistake when she decided to marry Mr. Byrne. Despite its lack of romantic and its fulness of ridiculous elements, the union was a happy one. A wonderful adaptability constituted her great point, and Mr. Byrne was not hard to manage. He apparently gained a new lease of life through his late marriage, and was less vehement in voicing his hobbies, though he indulged in profound ruminations upon them, if one might judge from the habit he had of looking long and solemnly into vacancy, protruding all the while his tightly-closed lips, and then suddenly contracting them as if his wise conclusions should never escape him.

His wife hovered around him with tenderest care, and if he looked pale or feeble she was full of solicitude and suggestions of remedies, including a wide range of temperance tonics, at which Mr. Byrne would grow sometimes facetious, sometimes sarcastic.



“Never mind me, my dear; you shall be a fine little widow soon enough.”

And she, exclaiming with horror, “Oh, I do believe you have wicked thoughts,” would go off by herself to indulge in a delicious cry, while Mr. Byrne, laughing softly, would protrude and contract his lips more vigorously than ever.

Mrs. Byrne’s thoughts and tears were now never bitter nor despairing ones, as in the days when her bit of tatting furnished her only resource against melancholy. She became an authority in all social and charitable enterprises. The necessity of maintaining the supremacy in such matters which the large fortune of Mr. Byrne had enabled her to assume, and the effort to make herself heard in the chattering councils of pushing aspirants for the place of distinction that she enjoyed, told upon the gentle demeanor which she had heretofore cultivated, believing it to be the test of fine manners and good breeding.

Her voice might sometimes be heard with a note of aggressiveness in it which approached so nearly to rudeness that the line of demarcation was indistinct, and once she did a

thing which might have been called unkind. On seeing at one of her grand entertainments a little old maid, gentle, sweet-faced, and modest as a violet, but presented to view as the most persistent of wallflowers—on seeing this creature, the very type of her former self, she failed in observing the code of her ancestors, and passed her by and—laughed!

Mr. Byrne placed no restrictions on his wife's championship of new ideas, except those looking to the enlargement of woman's sphere, and even then his opposition was kind.

"A woman has enough already to weigh her down. Don't hunt up more burdens for her." So Mrs. Byrne confined herself to high art, and headed a select circle of enthusiastic friends who made chair-backs and mantle-scarfs and an infinite number of impossibly useful and ornamental articles. Her house, for she clung to the old Morant mansion, became very grand and elegant in its interior decorations.

But not more wonderful were the changes in the old house than those which ten years of time brought to many portions of the old French district. The carpenter, the painter,

the kalsominer invaded and transformed it. From very dilapidated foundations rose houses clean, fresh, and uncompromisingly white, except where an occasional interloping disciple of the early English put on some æsthetic color. The shrewd Jew and pushing Gentile waked the *rabais* merchants from somnolency and taught them to display goods in every available window, ticketed, all regardless of cost. Even the little taxidermist freshened up his shop with new specimens, birds of all kinds resting on impossible green branches, brightened by still more impossible paper roses.

And these were the things which most frequently met the eyes of eager tourists who, beguiled by the wonderful descriptive powers of a certain brilliant writer of creole days, prowled around the old district, searching in vain for the peculiar features which lent a witching interest to his pen.

Change had come upon the household and every inmate of it but Celine. That turbaned head and dark face with its golden earrings would always be the same until some day when they would disappear forever. Upon

good old Major Morant had come the mightiest change of all. The wonder of his daughter's marriage constantly increased. The gentle current of his life was visibly disturbed by it, and one day he quietly and peacefully set sail for a more restful shore, leaving old Mr. Burton adrift.

From the hour that she hushed his sobs against her tender heart, John's son became Mrs. Byrne's tender charge, and Celine was promoted once again to the position of nurse. That position she still retained, for it is hard to depose a negro mammy, and she glided about the house with an inscrutable look that seemed to hold all mysteries in its depths.

Over the way the green and white cottage had grown a mansard roof and a bow-window, and the little woman who had flattened her nose against the less aristocratic window-panes tried faithfully to live up to the new dignities; but she could not forego the pleasure of watching her neighbors come out for a ride. A thrill of excitement would shoot through her as she saw the fine carriage dash up to the door to receive its occupants, and she could have told her far-away Northern

friends the invariable order in which they came. First always Mrs. Byrne, with an extraordinary number of wraps, then a feeble old man, and last but not one a small restless boy, who bounced up and down on the cushions in a way to excite the ire of the looker-on.

"She hasn't no function for managing children. I'd stop that if 'twas me. Law, how queer-looking he is, anyway! He don't look a mite like any of them."

And then the colored person, old Celine, whose presence was important to the small boy, and of sarcastic interest to the neighbor:

"Mis' Byrne might do better than to ride her out."

But Mrs. Byrne was no longer moved by observation that would have been painful to Miss Isabel. Gone with poverty and obscurity was all her sensitiveness. Her doors were wide open to the world.

She was very fond and very proud of the little boy committed to her care, though she, as well as the little woman over the way, recognized the fact that he was like none of the Morants. Physical beauty was not wanting.

The slender face was of the true Hellenic type, but the black, close curling hair, the large, bold black eyes, and the dusky yellow skin were matters of comment.

"Will you have the goodness to tell me, my dear," said Mr. Byrne, one day, watching him closely at his play, "who that child is like?"

"Certainly," responded his wife, with a triumphant smile. "He is like our French ancestors. It is the Huguenot blood which shows itself again in our family."

"Ah!" said he, seemingly quite satisfied. And then, as if the thought had again presented itself, he added, like one quoting authority, "Individuals having a specific tendency towards different races are constantly being born in every family. Now I would say—"

"I know what you would say," interrupted his wife, vehemently. "You would say what would irritate me beyond measure."

"Well, well, my dear," returned Mr. Byrne, "there is no harm done. You have prevented it." And he began that movement of his mouth which intimated that the subject was



closed so far as he was concerned. But his wife was much astonished and gratified when a few moments later he rose from his chair, came near her, and watching her outline with bright threads the great M that she was embroidering upon the child's clothing, said, feelingly,

"It is a fine thing, my dear, to come of no common strain, and to be as sure of that fact as you are. Family pride is a good thing, and I honor you for every sensitive defence of it."

By this time Mrs. Byrne's eyes were moist. Mr. Byrne was not much to look at; he was old, he was wrinkled, and uglier than he it was almost impossible to be; but he was very good, and he appreciated her.

The child, too, had something to suffer, well guarded as he seemed to be from everything unpleasant in life. He could not escape malicious remark. Once when his father was sitting with Mrs. Isabel, just as they used to do in days gone by, out on the pleasant gallery, talking sadly touching that mysterious ordering of events which had so changed the current of their lives, the little

boy rushed in quivering with excitement, and with his tear-stained face glowing with indignation.

"Papa, papa!" exclaimed he; but meeting with no answering sympathy in his father's eyes, he threw himself into his aunt's arms in the utter abandonment of grief.

"What is it, my child? Do tell me, my darling, what grieves you?" she asked, in caressing tones; then turning to Celine, who had followed the child, she asked again, "What is the matter?"

The old woman could not, or would not, explain.

"Ask him," she said, impassively.

"Speak, my dear," once more urged his aunt. "Tell me what has happened?"

And in a voice broken by sobs he told how he and Celine had gone out walking, and two boys—how he hated them!—had followed him and laughed at him, and Celine had tried to hush them, but they said—here his little body trembled, and putting his mouth close to her ear, he whispered the words he could not utter aloud—

"To bien habi', mais to un nég' quand

même." ("You are well dressed, but you are a negro for all that.")

For a moment his aunt shared his indignation, and then, laughing lightly, she kissed him, and wiping the tears from his eyes, said, "Why should you care for such nonsense? There," kissing him again, "run away to your play, my darling, and pay no attention to any silly words of naughty boys."

Turning towards John, she added,

"Isn't it provoking? If I were not proud of the likeness to the old Morants, I would regret his brunette beauty; but as it is, I can laugh at what would make others angry."

A gleam shot from old Celine's eyes as she led the boy away, and John uttered no word as his sister, unwilling that the child should go without another caress, rose and followed them.

What other reversion of type did he see in that small, dark face?

It was that which scorched his brain as with fire, that secret which consumed him with its never ending doubt, that other likeness.

What if no one but himself should ever see beyond the pleasant fiction which deluded his

sister? Could that help him to bear the terror of the truth which forever faced him like a mocking spectre?

The sudden death of his wife had made old associations painful to him. He had found relief only in isolating himself from those who had looked upon the bright side of his life, and in the early days of his sorrow he rarely visited the city.

Bending all his energies towards recovering the old plantation from the disastrous effects of the great overflow, it became for the greater part of the year his home.

The constant fluctuations of hope and despair in the heart of one who sees his fortune menaced by so many dangers that it seems the very foot-ball of fate, brings an excitement equalled only by the gambler's hazard; and the cotton-planter, staking his all upon the chances of Nature, must have a brave heart to face the many against him.

John Morant's luck became proverbial. Hopeful of nothing, he came to feel the influence of Nature's most smiling moods, and received such gifts at her hands as repaired all the ravages of her previous unfriendliness.

If Nature could only have repaired that other desolation with the love of his child! But it was not to be. He could not bear the presence of his son. If his repulsion had been strong when the boy was an infant, with no distinguishing characteristics to excite emotion, it was infinitely greater with his growth. He saw the gradual unfolding of peculiarities which could only be translated into the language of his fears. The child's joyousness, his frank, unrestrained gayety were not to him phases of all child life, but were manifest as the key-note of an irresponsible nature. The brunette beauty which was his sister's pride tortured him. Behind the great black eyes he fancied he saw a soul weighted by centuries of degradation, a development below the standard of his own proud race. Often as he looked upon the boy he wondered what instinct raised the impassable barrier between them. A great wall divided them; break it down he could not. All gracious, tender, and holy sentiments were powerless before it.

The child was conscious of this hostile scrutiny, and, like all children to whom love and

confidence are the heavenly manna which sustains their moral nature, he appeared to disadvantage under his father's eyes. Their unfriendly light fructified seeds of cunning and deceit, the rank growth of which were but deeper evidences to his unhappy father of a lower nature.

John Morant admitted that the only strong sentiment he could ever rouse in his son was fear.

What could the future hold in store for him but distressful probabilities? There were hours when conscience urged him to draw near the child and shelter him with the only parental love he could ever know; but antipathy ruled stronger than conscience.

Sometimes there came to his memory that story of Royston, the story told by Dr. Dickson in the familiarity of those other days. What a story that was of self-abnegation or self-degradation! Which was it? What was the quality which carried that man through the ordeal he elected to undergo? Was it a certain moral originality, a faithful effort towards a higher form of virtue than the conventional standard? or had his sense of honor,



coarsened by deteriorating influences, reached that dulness when he could no longer feel a stain like a wound?

Dickson had certainly taken the higher view of the case. He had seen in that surrender of all for another's good something divine; but Dickson was quixotic in his sympathies.

Thus waxing and waning convictions founded themselves upon every variety of argument, but through them all there was never a moment when he could have acted other than as his loyal instincts dictated, as the mighty restraining traditions of his time demanded.

It was in one of these tense and brooding moods that a circumstance occurred which tended to increase his melancholy.

The day had been close and warm, and returning early to the old house, he had been lured by the cool dimness of the parlor to rest there a moment, without making his presence known. His father's old chair was in the most secluded corner, and dropping into it, he gave himself up to the thoughts which most desperately pursued him when he was alone.

He heard his sister's voice in the hall speaking to Celine.

“ I am very tired and need rest, and am not at home to anybody.”

She came into the room where he sat without observing him. In her hand she held a package of bonbons, and going towards a small desk, near a front window, she opened it, and placed the package inside. Turning the key in the lock without removing it, she said, aloud,

“ There, he will not find them there, and he must eat no more to-day ;” and she went away still without seeing her brother.

Some time afterwards, John’s reverie was disturbed by a slight grating noise, and a sound like nothing so much as a little mouse whisking itself among carefully stored papers. Accustomed as he had become to the dimness of the room, it was still difficult for him to discover the small, dark object which caused it ; but contracting his brows, even shading his eyes with his hand to gain directness of vision, he saw it. The desk was open, the package of bonbons was open, and there, stealthily conveying the sweets to mouth and pocket, was the child.

One would have said it was a small thing,

suggestive of nothing, an act to be reproved and forgotten ; but the effect it produced upon John was beyond the measure of the misdemeanor. He was seized with an intolerable sense of shame. The hand which he had raised above his eyes closed over them. He could not bring himself to confront the child with his knowledge of its fault, and he remained silent.

It might have passed away from his mind, but the following morning he was near by when his sister reproved the child for the fact which she had discovered, and he heard him deny it. Rage seized upon him then as thoroughly as shame had done.

To lie and steal ! Was that what was in him ? He would teach him as others had been taught. He advanced and struck him.

It was the first and only punishment he ever gave the boy ; for that evening Celine told him a secret which she had kept since that morning when she had wakened and seen the white daylight coming through the half-drawn curtain, to show her what the night had brought.

That which would have criminated herself

she left untold ; but that Bamma had in some way discovered his fatal suspicion she made clear to him, and that she had had the courage to go far away from it. What others had thought, what the physician had thought, might never transpire ; but Celine had lifted the fatal cloth from her face, and she knew. Not one of the details was spared him, for she had learned to love the little boy, and as he had struck so did she strike.

He received the blow with no outward demonstration of the shock. He had learned to bear much ; but in the long night-time which followed, the new sorrow brought with it a new suggestion. For him alone, he believed, his wife had sacrificed herself, for his sake, and he had been cruel to her child !

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE chimes of the old cathedral had not yet sounded the Angelus. The air had all the chill dampness of an hour remote from yesterday's last sunbeam, that which had gilded the statue in Jackson Square, withdrawn itself, and died upon the surface of the river. A cough as if the dampness was trying to human comfort, the ring of a heel upon the banquette, a figure here and there moving rapidly, and John Morant felt that he was not alone upon the street.

Restless and sleepless, he had passed a weary night, and when he could make a pretence of sleep no longer he had risen and dressed himself, waiting for the day. A curious interest suddenly stirred him, a desire to observe the peculiar population which goes forth in the dark, misty, morning hours, and surges through the French market.

A place of many traditions, it is also a place of many disappointments; but to a keen ob-

server the great market-place below Canal Street affords an excellent opportunity of seeing certain conditions of life rarely met with elsewhere. For this reason it attracted John Morant.

Going early, and following the indications of those who went onward towards that central point of distribution of everything to meet the wants of a mass of humanity, he felt the stillness of the streets less oppressive than the din and uproar which gradually opened upon him as he advanced, and became a veritable pandemonium as he entered the place. Calls of birds and fowls, merry laughter, fierce denunciations, and cries in every known language greeted him. Wandering for a while up and down, distracted by the confusion of tongues and the discordant sounds, he at last took position near a stand where the artistic arrangement of green and golden fruit was as pleasing to his eye as to many others who passed that way.

It was a fit time and place to study the faces of those filing in endless procession before him. Smiling, frowning, pushing, elbowing their way, coarse, brutal men, delicate women,



young children, of every hue and every shade under the sun, they went by. Certain types presented themselves more frequently than others. The burly African, with flat nose, protruding, sensual mouth, and shining ebony skin, the smirking mulatto, aggressive in the first step towards the higher plane, the pathetic, dark-eyed quadroon, who sees the shadow not yet lifted, the pale, consumptive octroon struggling with the burden of physical weakness—these seemed almost sinister in their constant reappearance. They represented to his morbid vision the foundations of a social structure which philanthropy and the coming years were to erect.

The sentimental side of his nature could comprehend the force of the abstract as well as actual presentation of the claims of the sad-eyed women to be raised from the lowliness of their estate. Since the world began, men's hearts have responded to the pitiableness of woman's condition, the slavery of it appealing to them as all bondage appeals.

He could well understand the potency of sex as a factor in the case. If his own child's eyes had looked up to him from a sweet girl-

face, challenging the height and depth of human love, they would have been invested with a pathos touching the measure of human sympathies; but all the intellectual pride and strength of his nature protested against the degradation of a mongrel race.

Was it imminent? Were the years bringing it? Would others suffer the fantastic fate that had come to him? He watched the kaleidoscopic stream pouring through the heavy archways, going out and coming in, always grinding the same grist, light and dark, dark and light, white and yellow, yellow and white, until his heart sank within him, his brain grew dull. And it was time to go. The sun was high over the old cathedral, the prayers of the latest devotee were said, and the city had taken on the look of the long, weary day.

Through some impulse strangely at variance with his usual indifference to his son, that morning he resolved to return at once to the old plantation, and to take the child with him. Since that blow a remorseful pity had entered his heart, very, very faint, but growing slowly. He could not give him love, but he might grant him indulgence, so the boy went.

The plantation was in all the glory of a great crop. The picking season had begun. The parallel green lines were all obliterated; far across the intervening spaces the branches twined and laced in one solid mass of foliage, blossom and boll, and the busy pickers were all there, those whom the major would have rejoiced to see bending to the task of reconstructing the fortunes of the Morants.

To the restless boy, unrestrained by any forced companionship with his father, there seemed nothing comparable to the beauty of the place and the wild freedom he there enjoyed. He was here, there, and everywhere over it. When the tired mules detached from the wagons shook themselves, with one restless quiver of the flesh, free of the burdensome harness, he was ready to mount the gentlest and trot away to the bayou where, under the shadow of the willows, they cooled their heated flanks. And after sunset, even after the twilight had faded, when the negroes grouped themselves around the scales, those important witnesses of their idleness or industry, he was there shouting, laughing, or lifting the glowing lantern to the registering numbers.

But the spot which most fascinated him was the gin-house.

The whir of machinery stirred some wild, uncanny spirit within him. His black eyes would roll, his white teeth gleam, and his small body sway to and fro as if in response to some melody it sounded, which he alone could hear.

At the gin-house, too, there were huge platforms where the snow-white staple lay drying in the sun. He enjoyed rolling over and over on it like some little animal in kittenish play. Then when he was tired he would scamper away, into the building, up the stair-ways to the topmost story, where piles of the same snowy stuff lay stored ready to be raked into the great hoppers from which it fell down upon the rolling saws of the gin beneath.

There were peeps into the lint-room where Uncle Dan'l presided, the beau ideal St. Nick, if ever the old saint wore an ebony mask.

How cool the draught of the flues as they poured the light snowy flakes out in steady streams, piling great drifts in the corners, and hanging such draperies upon the rafters as would have delighted the eye of an artist.

And the talks with Uncle Dan'l. Was ever any one as willing to talk and to listen as he?

"You never get tired working in here, do you, Uncle Dan'l?"

"I nebber gits tired wo'king nowhar, chile. Dar's two things Ise allus willin' an' glad ter do—to wo'k an' pray."

"Are they both very tiresome things, Uncle Dan'l?"

"Wo'k an' pra'rs is bof alike, chile. Dey 'pen's on de sperrit. Yes, dey 'pen's on de sperrit, dat's de truf. Now, I done seen some folks 'dout de sperrit so owdashus lazy dat it 'peared like dey didn't hav' no 'clinashun to draw der breaf, but dem folks is allus jest as cunnin' as de coon. Dey know how to fotch up at sum' un else's corn patch. En as toe de sperrit fo' pra'rs, dar's some folks allus axin' fo' de merrit uv grate tribbleashuns, so as ter git to hebben mi'ty quick; an' when de trubble do come, dey lites out an' leaves sum' un else toe clar away de things."

"Did you ever have any of your prayers answered, Uncle Dan'l?"

"Toe be sho', chile, toe be sho' I has. My

pra'rs is allus answered. What makes yo' ax a question like dat?"

Uncle Dan'l stopped a moment for the child's reply, and then added, warningly, as he came too far in the current of the snowy stream,

"Yo' jest better git 'way from dar a little bit, honey. Yo' pappy ain't gwine toe like fo' yo' toe git dat cotton in yo' t'roat. He'll be a blamin' me."

"You needn't be afraid, Uncle Dan'l. He won't care. I was just going to ask you if you prayed for him to love me, would it do any good?"

"Well, yo' is a cur'us chile, sho'. What makes yo' t'ink yo' pappy don' luv yo'?"

"Oh, well, I don't know; but I am always so scared when he calls me. Were you ever scared of anybody?"

"Skeered, chile? Why toe be sho' Ise been skeered. My ole master wuz a pow'ful hand toe skeer folks. Dar warn't his ekal in de parish."

"And what did you do when you were scared?"

"He! he! he! Chile, yo' axes too many



queschums," said the old man, as he passed out of the lint-room closely followed by the boy. "Ef yo' keep on axin' queschums I lay I'll tell yo' sumpin' what ain't true. Nobody can't answer too many queschums 'thout git-tin' up inter the 'magernashums."

"What sort of place is that?"

The old negro paused a moment, chuckled softly to himself at the boy's open-eyed wonder, and said,

"I ain't gwine toe tell yo', fo' I mout git dar."

The boy looked at Uncle Dan'l a moment, and then recognizing the fact that the old negro had gone beyond the bounds of the probable, he bounded away with a gay laugh.

"My Lord!" said Uncle Dan'l, with a sudden sound of anxiety in his voice, "whar's dat boy gwine now?"

The child, with his usual inability to think long or seriously of any one thing, went dancing and singing and whistling about the dangerous places, until it made the old man's head dizzy to look at him.

"Yo' gwine toe git hurt sho'," he called to him.

“Oh no, I will not, Uncle Dan’l,” he answered, confidently; “I can take care of myself. See me.”

The great wheel was turning and turning in never-ending revolutions when the child stopped to look at it, and he was seized with a desire to imitate its motion. Extending his arms, he whirled them round and round like circling wings, and with the motions of some fascinated bird he approached nearer and nearer.

“See, Uncle Dan’l,” he called, gleefully, “I am going to that place; you know where.”

His out-stretched hands touched the wheel. Some portion of his clothing must have caught in the band which suddenly held him in its cruel grasp.

Over and over went the wheel, bearing with it a burden weightier than all the snowy treasures ever garnered to test its powers.

With the first note of warning the wheel ceased to turn, but among all the probabilities *Life* was the farthest removed from the child.

When the father came the little shattered body was lying upon the downy, snow-white couch to which Uncle Dan’l had brought it.

The end was not far off, that much John Morant could see. His breath went, as it were, out of his own body. Then Nature triumphed, the father's heart asserted itself, and that same cry which generations ago went up to heaven, again ascended: "My son, would God I had died for thee!" In that supreme moment all barriers were broken down.

Bending low over the little form, he found that the child still breathed. He clasped his arms around him and lifted him a little, so that the head lay where it never before had rested, in the hollow of the father's strong and loving arm.

The child's breath came hard and fast, and he opened his black eyes to meet the look of sympathy strange to him. A splendid light as of some new intelligence born of the death-struggle illumined them and made them beautiful to John Morant, even to that last moment when light and life were gone.

Through the gathering moisture which veiled his vision, the light shone down deep into the father's heart. It glorified the great humanity quickening there. Alas! its fading radiance also touched one unchangeable truth.

It was better so. In life there could have been no happy meeting face to face. Death only had made them equals—unless after death, also, the distinctions of race are preserved forever.

But somewhere there must be light. Would he ever see it? And would he some day meet them both again, his wife and child, with the pressure of this “unintelligible world” lifted from his soul?

At least, for this life, he had escaped the gulf towards which he had been drifting.

## CHAPTER XX.

ONE person still mourns the death of John Morant's little son. The dark skin and wilful ways which brought grief to the father's heart are always the occasion of fond comment for Mrs. Byrne. She persistently and with great pride maintains that "He was like the old Morants."

When she greets her brother the tears spring to her eyes more readily even than in the olden time, since each meeting with him recalls most vividly the child she loved as her own. She is very happy, however, in her marriage. Late wedded is sometimes well wedded, and she and Mr. Byrne live lovingly together. If he ever thinks his large fortune is being lavishly expended, he makes no sign. One curious idea possesses Mrs. Byrne. So certain is she that Clemence the coiffeuse was the architect of her new fortunes, that she has secured by her grateful exertions an immense

patronage and popularity for that very genteel colored artiste.

It was only a short while ago that John Morant was tempted to stroll through the old French quarter, without avoiding, as he usually did, the direction of the little taxidermist's shop. He came upon it unexpectedly. It was closed. Faded green shutters barred the window and door-way, while over the latter a busy spider was beginning to weave a web from frame to shutter. As he stood wondering at the change, an old woman crossed the street to say to him,

"Dose people gon' to France."

"To live?" inquired John, with eager interest in his voice.

"Me, I don' say fo' true," responded the woman, "but som' bodie say, Marie haf one redlashon in France, an' she leef her som' nize properties, an' dey all 'e time goin' t' lif dere."

John received this announcement with no small degree of satisfaction. He felt sure that the taxidermist as well as his wife had suspected some far-off taint in Bamma's blood, and he feared that their volubility increasing with years might transfer their impressions to



other and less friendly minds. To feel that possibility no longer confronting him is a relief. He has, however, a constant memento of Emile and Marie in the white blackbird, that freak of nature which occupies a place upon his library mantle-piece instead of the contemplated raven above the chamber door, as it serves much the same purpose of arousing similar but more subdued elements of sorrow and despair.

Retaining the house in the city which he once called home, John Morant rarely enters it. For the greater part of the year it is closed, and passers-by comment discontentedly on the unequal distribution of wealth which permits waste for some and want for others. When he does occupy it Dr. Dickson and Rev. Mr. Shriver renew their visits to his library, and indulge freely in their literary and philosophical discussions. John always takes a quiet and interested part in them, except when they broach the old questions of races and the possibilities of negro culture. Then he becomes a silent and even involuntary listener, in strange contrast with his former apparently profound absorption in these studies.

It is observed, however, that John Morant is an unostentatious but energetic friend of the negro race. He assists them personally on every proper occasion, and advocates their systematic education and their rights to untrammelled citizenship.

One may visit the old Morant plantation any day and be convinced that the less successful neighbors are wrong in attributing John Morant's success to "his good-luck in securing the best hands in the country." Quick observers note the just dealings with those employed by him. The zeal for the master's interest springs from a knowledge of its sure return in kind.

One old "hand" is now missed from the place. Uncle Dan'l has been gathered to his sable fathers. He died like a good planter and true Methodist, alternately in his delirium assigning their work to the field-hands and shouting glory to God. He was buried at his own request under a great, solitary oak in the cotton-field, amid the singing, praying, weeping, and shouting of the whole colored congregation, while white neighbors paying a tribute of respect to genuine worth, gave grace

and dignity to the occasion. He may not have reached the golden-streeted Jerusalem of his childish imagination, but all who knew him concur in the belief that he has "gone where the good niggers go."

Old Celine has so recently passed away that the servants and neighbors are still talking of the rosewood coffin, the magnificent flowers, the train of carriages, and the "beautiful funeral," which the old Southern family gave to its freed-woman so long their slave. The white-souled negress was stately and reticent to the last, concealing in the dark shadows of her own bosom the terrible secret of Bamma Morant. The family surrounded her death-bed. Dr. Dickson and Mr. Shriver having exhausted their special duties, stood by with folded arms. Mr. and Mrs. Byrne sat at the foot of the bed with grave countenances. John's chair was close to the bedside, and he was holding with a gentle pressure her withered, bronzed hand in his own. The servants occupied the windows and the door-way. There was perfect silence in the room save the ticking of the clock on the mantel.

Suddenly the expiring woman opened her

eyes and fixed them tenderly on the sympathetic face of the man whom she had nursed as babe and child. The spirit escaping out of space seemed to have lost the true conception of time. Slowly and anxiously she muttered her last words :

“Don’ go dat way, honey! not dat way, it’s mizry.”

Words of profound significance to John Morant, but unintelligible to all the rest.

THE END.



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